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**A Pleasure in Pain: Contemporary Mainstream
Cinema's Fascination with the Aestheticized
Spectacle of the Controlled Body**

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in Film and Television Studies

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the material included in this thesis has not been used in any other capacity, and therefore has not been published elsewhere. The thesis is all the author's own work, and has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.

Abstract

This thesis considers the ways in which the dominated, marked and suffering body (the controlled body) has been represented and employed in recent mainstream cinema. Noting a shift from narratives that depict escape and the alleviation of torment to ones that highlight subjection and endurance, it probes the influences and implications of the change.

The project employs an interdisciplinary approach that utilizes discourses from anthropology, art history and cultural studies in conjunction with textual analysis, and consequently attempts to rethink a pleasure in pain outside psychoanalytically informed theories. The thesis argues that diverse images of pain can be usefully understood by examining them as part of a collective negotiation of the relationship we have with our bodies in Western culture, especially in respect of agency and corporeality. Identifying a fascination for activities that fuse concepts of pain and pleasure, in particular sadomasochism, body modification, artwork and extreme sports, the study argues that the controlled body borrows heavily from these sources for its imagery but typically understates the social motivations of masochistic pleasure and assertion of autonomy.

The research uncovers a range of narrative strategies that justify depictions of masochism (especially in men) that deflect the implication of pleasurable pain whilst simultaneously formulating it as part of personal identity. It investigates how pain and the closeness to death are used to convey a vitality of existence, and also, through an analysis of the spectacle and the narrative patterns in recent films, offers an appreciation of how the spectator engages with the texts. Furthermore, the iconography of pain and control is shown to be important in our conceptualization of beauty, whilst the personal appropriation of suffering can be interpreted as an affirmative choice. The thesis therefore reveals that, with varying degrees of explicitness, mainstream cinema has broached contemporary anxieties regarding self-determination and identity through the representation of the controlled body.

Abbreviations

BASE	Building, Antennae, Span, Earth
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBFC	British Board of Film Classification
BDSM	Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, and Sadomasochism
CCTV	Closed-circuit Television
CD-ROM	Compact Disc Read-Only Memory
CF	Cystic Fibrosis
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FMV	Full Motion Video
IV	Intra-venous
LWT	London Weekend Television
MTV	Music Television
PC	Personal Computer
S&M	Sadomasochism
S/M	Sadomasochism
SM	Sadomasochism
SWAT	Special Weapons and Tactics
tx.	Transmission date
WIP	Women in Prison

Introduction

As I write, David Blaine has just completed forty-four days suspended in a plastic box over the Thames, surviving only on water. In part one of the television programme *David Blaine: Above the Below* (2003) he expressed his reasoning: ‘because I wanna feel’.

In Harry Houdini’s similar feats one hundred years earlier, escapology was pivotal. The spectator’s interest lay in how he would extricate himself. With David Blaine, we witness a strikingly different emphasis, one that is replicated in the contemporary depictions of restraint and control in mainstream films. For Blaine, escape is not the objective; for him it is the challenge of submission and endurance. But it is not entirely a personal pleasure; Blaine also states, ‘I love making people watch suffering’ (in *David Blaine: Above the Below*, part 2, 2003), and we appear to be fascinated.

In Blaine’s most spectacular feat of endurance, he stood bare-chested entombed in ice for nearly sixty-two hours in New York’s Times Square (figure 0.1).¹ In addition to the event, the newspaper coverage and resulting television programme, *David Blaine: Frozen in Time* (2001), placed great weight on his punishing preparations.² The spectator’s fascination therefore appears to have transferred from watching Houdini’s avoidance of suffering to observing not only the ability to survive the ordeal, but also the spectacularizing of painful pursuits. That we, and performers such as Blaine, take pleasure in the pain is fundamental to my thesis, for it is the presence of such themes and depictions in contemporary mainstream cinema

¹ The stunt is reminiscent of one of Houdini’s film serials, *The Man From Beyond* (Burton King, USA, 1922), where a man is discovered frozen in a block of ice. Further, Houdini had hoped to tour with an act based on him being encased in ice, but faced logistical problems with regard to it melting.

² For example, a profile of David Blaine in the *Sunday Times* stated: ‘To prepare for his latest stunt, Blaine submerged himself in icy water for 12 hours, fasted for four days and learnt to sleep standing’ (Anonymous 2000, 17). In articles printed at the beginning and at the end of Blaine’s feat, George Gordon in the *Daily Mail* stressed the same twelve-hour period spent in the icy water (2000a, 11 and 2000b, 17), whilst *David Blaine: Frozen in Time* depicted it.



Figure 0.1 Spectacle of suffering in *David Blaine: Frozen in Time*

that form the corpus of my study.

The central proposition of this research is that in the last twenty years, a number of films have begun to chart a new association between the body, pain and pleasure. Encompassing motion pictures featuring major movie stars, for example *Fight Club* (David Fincher, USA/Germany, 1999) starring Brad Pitt, notorious films, for instance *Boxing Helena* (Jennifer Chambers Lynch, USA, 1993), and crossover art cinema, such as *Secretary* (Steven Shainberg, USA, 2002), these films are all orientated around the representation of painful body control. The relationship finds its source in society's radical contemporary conceptions of the body, but draws on a historical legacy of aestheticized suffering. These cinematic representations I call the controlled body.

I am using the phrase in quite a strict way, for it relates to an increasingly prevalent trend in our late-industrial, consumerist society: one that sees the body as a site for asserting control via pain. In an age when more and more regulations are seemingly imposed upon the individual, and personal freedom and self-determination are restricted, the demand for some method of asserting mastery has become

pronounced. Rather than anarchy, the resistance usually takes the form of bucking the system: smashing a speed camera or dodging a ticket inspector. But these acts are merely inexact reactions rather than personal assertions of autonomy. The human body affords a more direct means of imposing your will. As a malleable entity, the body offers the opportunity to be styled to personal taste, but more than just fashion, the control over the body confronts the issue of the right to physical intervention: a corporeal resistance to institutional authority and a confirmation of selfhood via intense pain. Blaine's stunts, with their emphasis on endurance and masochistic pleasure, are symptomatic of this trend.

David Morgan, in his study 'Pain: The Unrelieved Condition of Modernity', argues that whilst previous generations have sought to reconcile suffering and disaster with moral expectations of life, in late modernity we are faced with a situation where 'representations of pain and suffering are disassociated from ethical and political contexts and the quest for meaning' (2002, 307). His reasoning is that the experience of pain has been both medicalized and privatized, therefore removing it from the context of morality. Thus:

Because modern medicine can effectively alleviate discomfort and pain, the moral and social embodiment of suffering disappears between two powerful discourses which assume that pain is solely a function of *having* a body, and relatedly that suffering is devoid of existential and ethical significance once its symptoms have been clinically relieved. (2002, 314)

For Morgan, grounding suffering in purely physical stimuli denies its significance, and he is critical of contemporary cinema, which he classifies as part of 'the cultural commodification of violence and pain' (2002, 320). The films discussed in detail in my study correspond to a current groundswell in cultural activities that attempt to reinvigorate pain with meaning. It may not be the transcendental significance that Morgan sees late modernity being devoid of, but the films do attempt to wrestle away

pain from the anaesthetized, medicalized, and institutionalized suffering he correctly notes suffuses the Western world.

That pain might have positive properties is no revelation. Pain and pleasure have coincided throughout history, from the ecstasies of martyred saints and the religious flagellants to the writings of de Sade and Sacher-Masoch. The iconographies these inspire inflect my study of mainstream contemporary cinema, but newer practices define it. In the past twenty years, a number of intertwined activities have (re)surfaced as highly visible popular pursuits, and in these, displayed pain and control is integral. Some involve a confrontation with corporeal suffering within the realm of art. Exhibitions such as *Spectacular Bodies* (2000-2001) and *Körperwelten* (*Body Worlds*) (2002-2003) have revelled in the display of bodies in various stages of dismemberment, and performance artists including Franko B and Ron Athey have publicly torn and slashed their flesh whilst audiences have looked on, frequently squirming whilst imagining the pain, yet also enjoying the spectacle of it.³ Other recent practices entail a more direct relationship with suffering. For the most part, these involve the pain being self-inflicted, with the participants coding the experience, often an exquisite agony, with their own significance. As pastimes, they offer heightened instances of physical and emotional pain deliberately undertaken within a context of declaring mastery over the body. I am thinking in particular of body modification (tattooing, piercing, branding etc.), extreme sports, and what is usually called sadomasochism, but what I have chosen to call Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, and Sadomasochism (BDSM), all of which are discussed in my research in relation to recent films.⁴ These activities offer an encounter with pain, but crucially, they also provide the vital spectacle of the

³ For some artists, the experiencing of the pain is fundamental to the performance, but Franko B actually uses local anaesthetic, as he considers the end effect more important than the pain.

⁴ The abbreviation BDSM is in circulation within society and is the preferred terminology of many. The importance of its distinctions will be addressed later in the introduction.

suffering and endurance that attests to the pain.

My concern is therefore for the confrontation of pain, both one's own, but also the imagining of another's, where the urge is to sense it. The desire is to feel the hurt, but to feel it on your terms, for your reasons, and so it is invested with control. In particular, in a society that has evolved sophisticated medical and cultural methods of avoiding it at all costs, the creation of pain is interpreted as an affirmation of living. For example, there is evidence of a longstanding fascination for body modification (bound feet, marked flesh etc.) stretching back 30,000 years of humankind (Mascia-Lees and Sharpe 1992a, 1). But the marks that were culturally constructed signs of adornment and mutilation, now take on a far more individualistic tone of expression. Although tattooing and body piercing have lately become quite mainstream, a recent study has insisted they cannot be impoverished into mere fashion accessories (Sweetman 1999b). Rather, body modification practices, especially the more extreme forms, are spoken of by participants as ways of imposing their will over their bodies. Similar comments regarding pain and control are made about extreme sports, with the idea of pushing the body to the limit to feel free. But probably the most intensified example, and one increasingly visible in contemporary culture, is BDSM. Falsely familiar from numerous music videos, advertisements and fashion shows, as well as films, the lived experience of BDSM, especially the masochist's position, infuses my whole thesis. The formative context for this research is therefore the desire for subjection, to endure suffering, and to find an exquisite pleasure in pain.

The themes discussed throughout my study developed from the intuitive starting point that some films were endeavouring to tap into the cultural concerns for control of the body. The suffering body is, of course, not new to cinema. Torture and pain have been persistent themes throughout, and whilst women have traditionally screamed in agony, men have stoically endured beatings and torment for the greater

good, whatever it may be. What is more peculiarly recent, at least in its overt form, is the depiction of pain as pleasure when linked to a masochistic impulse, and the foregrounding of marking the body to articulate control. These representations form the basis of my investigation.

A cursory examination of films made in the past ten years confirmed Hollywood's interest, with many of the movies sparking controversy because of their unclear division of pleasure and pain. A more thorough survey revealed a long legacy but with a discernible intersection with themes of masochism and control emerging from the early 1980s and reaching a peak in the late 1990s. The films are generically disparate; they include thrillers, romantic comedies, documentaries and erotic dramas. However, by undertaking my study, I am arguing that we can usefully analyse a group of films that are united by their closeness to recent reformulations of the representation and importance of painful pleasures.

Films are loci for culturally significant representations: they both help form and are formed by socially and politically negotiated meanings. Although essentialist determinations of the texts must be avoided, the filmic appearances of styles and developments emerging in the wider culture are worthy of investigation for what they might tell us about the values placed in them, and which ones are deemed significant. For example, how is BDSM represented? Is it positive or negative, and does gender have a role to play? Is body modification a fashion, a statement of intent, or a sign of deviance? What does the performance of pain tell us about our relationship to the body in Western culture?

Henry A. Giroux maintains that with the pedagogic power of cinema comes the responsibility of addressing the broader relationship with social, political and economic concerns, yet there is no evidence of private and public discourses being reconciled (2002, 279). That the cinematic representations of the controlled body

frequently have little that correspond with the meanings conferred by participants in the activities that inspired them is therefore of great significance. Consequently, I pay particular attention to these divergences between the subcultural interpretations, and the officially sanctioned meanings projected by the films, and ask what might prompt the deviations.

With one exception, the films discussed in detail in my research were made in the past twenty years, with the vast majority from 1990 onwards.⁵ In all four main chapters, the painful pursuits are part of personal projects that announce or denounce control over the body. But not all the texts I have selected immediately appear to fit into the category of a pleasurable pain. Only three chapters are orientated around culturally recognizable acts engaging pain for personal control and pleasure (BDSM, body modification and dangerous games); Chapter 4 focuses on the pain and domination of the victims of serial killers. Not founded on contemporary cultural pursuits, the films do tap into the renewed interest in artistic depictions of suffering, and so foreground the corporeally punished victim. In these films, the serial killer announces his control over the victim (and the investigator), not through merely killing, but by marking the body and aesthetically posing the crime scene. The very excess demonstrates the murderer's control. There is no pleasure for the murder victim, but much of our spectatorial pleasure comes from this aestheticizing of suffering and control. Yet, even in this example of heightened sadistic domination, there is an additional factor, for I am dealing with boundary states, where the distinction between pleasure and pain is blurred, and heavily reliant on context. By the murderer imbuing the crime scene with an artistic quality, the investigator and the spectator are compelled to marvel at the killer's control whilst, in a pseudo-

⁵ The exception is *Tattoo* (Bob Brooks, USA, 1981), which only just falls outside the period, and as its name suggests, directly addresses a primary concern for the controlled body: the modification of the skin through painful, permanent adornment.

masochistic process, both have to envisage the pain of the victim to solve the crime. What is produced is a fusion of suffering and splendour, with the controlled body at its centre.

Although my title places great weight on display, the visual element is interdependent with the narrative in the film; indeed, the story is most frequently orientated around the production of the spectacle of the controlled body, and therefore the narrative constitutes a significant element of the fascination. More than isolated visual moments, the aestheticized pursuits, that combine pleasure and pain, are the structuring motifs of the films. Through this arrangement, the notion of control pervades the text.

Elaine Scarry, in her book *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, rightly classifies pain via its ‘unsharability’ (1985, 4). It is very difficult to imagine another person’s pain, especially if there is no visible injury or implement of pain. The films that form my area of research invest heavily in the iconography of pain, and raid traditional and contemporary aesthetic techniques and practices to evoke the pain of the suffering body. Through such referents, the films attempt a tangible projection of sensation. However, we are so familiar with the image of a whip connoting pain, it can be difficult to imagine the exquisite pain felt by the masochist under the lash. And yet, that there may be unknown pleasures in pain is the allure of the controlled body.

Through my work, I aim to provide a situated critical study of the construction and circulation of beliefs about pain, pleasure, beauty and control, as depicted in mainstream cinema in the last twenty years. I ask how pain is conceived, and what meanings it is imbued with. How are cultural discourses of autonomy through pain translated in the cinema? What is lost and what remains? And ponder why these choices may be made: is the masochistic impulse something to be denied? What

strategies are invoked to invite the spectator's gaze? Further, images that induce disgust, or prompt the urge to look away, are frequently embedded in discourses and scenes of great formal elegance that encourage or necessitate looking. Like David Blaine, the films seem to 'love making people watch suffering', but repeatedly the status of that suffering is open to interpretation and is contradictory: it resides as both pleasurable pain and painful pleasure. What might the interventions on the body tell us about how control is conceived and visualized? What fears might be contained in characters grappling to understand, experience and control pain? And foundational to these inquiries, what might have influenced this cinematic confrontation of pain, and how is it coded as control?

Because of my interest in how the controlled body relates to its cultural context, my thesis is very much an interdisciplinary project. It addresses the boundaries of film studies, cultural studies, and in a limited way, anthropology, in relation to the body as a site of pleasure and pain. Through applying perspectives gleaned from these various academic fields, I have attempted to construct a framework of intersecting attitudes towards the controlled body, including representations and experiences of suffering. The fusion of disciplines has been fruitful, for it has allowed me to contemplate actual pleasures and attractions of control in other spaces, and offer a judgement as to how they might correspond to the cinematic representations. Within the formulation, I offer textual analysis of significant films produced during the last twenty years, whilst situating them amidst their own cinematic history of their respective themes (BDSM, body modification, serial killers and games). Some of the films correspond directly with cultural practices that are founded on painful activities that enounce control (for example, BDSM in *Secretary*), others are more tangential (for instance, the relationship of video games to *The Game* (David Fincher, USA, 1997)); but evidence, both textual and extra-

textual, guides my comparisons.

By engaging with the expanded discourses of pain, it has invited an exploration of the adequacy of the dominant paradigms, most notably the application of psychoanalytic explanations for culturally lived and chosen experiences. Psychoanalysis is often wielded as a blunt instrument when explanations are sought for BDSM, so conclusions reached are frequently far removed from the practical applications of the activity. Through studying BDSM as a social, political and performative act, I hope to have afforded the greater degree of subtlety and awareness of content and context that the activity demands. The importance of this attention to detail is that as well as forming the basis for a chapter in this thesis, BDSM provides a set of concepts, values and practices that percolate through the whole work. Thus, the broadened debate, embracing the socially appropriated meanings of BDSM actions, commentaries of why people engage in painful pursuits such as body modification and extreme sports, and the depiction of suffering, has provided the basis for understanding the cinematic representation of the controlled body.

It is pertinent now to indicate why I have chosen the abbreviation BDSM for what is usually termed sadomasochism. Firstly, it is less pejorative than sadomasochism, which brings with it the baggage of countless titillating tabloid newspaper articles. The celebrated trial of Madame Cynthia Payne's 'House of Cyn' in the United Kingdom in 1987 produced many such stories, with its combination of BDSM, rumours of Lords and lawyers queuing up for services, and payments by luncheon vouchers. Moral indignation fused with comedy to form the façade behind which lay the real interest of the story: the inside information on BDSM. The discussions of musician Michael Hutchence's death in terms of autoerotic

asphyxiation also displayed these features.⁶ BDSM is thus contained by mystery and ridicule. The referencing of BDSM as a practice bound up with secret techniques and promising extraordinary pleasures, all within a framework of condemnation, exists throughout Western culture, including, as we shall see, Hollywood cinema.⁷

The second reason for using BDSM is to suggest a plurality of activities, which is something denied by the singular term sadomasochism. Thus, we have bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, *and* sadomasochism, where sadomasochism can be usefully understood to mean pain play. Through placing my emphasis equally on these deeds, I hope to distance my study from the overarching use of the term sadomasochism, which misconceives the socially undertaken activity of BDSM as defined by pain alone. In practice, it is anchored in control.

In *Pain and Passion: A Psychoanalyst Explores the World of S & M*, Robert Stoller attempts to expand our understanding of BDSM (or sadomasochism as he calls it) beyond the scope of psychoanalytic theory via a combination of interviews and non-participating observations.⁸ Thus, he declares, ‘I must conclude that *there is no sadomasochistic perversion*; rather, there are many sadomasochistic perversions’ (1991, 8). Over the space of five pages, he proceeds to list numerous BDSM techniques, including various types of whipping, piercing, cutting, hanging (e.g. suspension by limbs and via pierced flesh), stretching on racks, gagging, imprisonment (e.g. cages and masks), altered consciousness (e.g. prolonged suffering

⁶ Autoerotic asphyxiation is the interference with the blood supply to the brain to heighten orgasm. The titillation arose from the minutiae: naked body, hanging from a door by his belt, alcohol, Prozac and cocaine in his blood, all of which prompted questions for the uninitiated, especially, (how) does it work? But through living the rock star’s life, Hutchence and his actions were distanced and defined as ‘other’.

⁷ Fascination but resistance to BDSM is not new though, with J. W. Archenholtz reporting on a London man (a musician again) dying from autoerotic asphyxiation in 1791, and a pamphlet of the time, called *Modern Propensities*, describing in detail his sexual practice. In contrast, the judge trying the assisting prostitute for murder ordered all court documents to be destroyed (in Bloch 1996, 451-454).

⁸ BDSM is frequently given terms that are seen as less pejorative than sadomasochism, such as S&M, S/M and SM. Throughout the thesis I will retain each author’s choice of appellation for BDSM, but their comments should be seen to be part of the multitude of interpretations of BDSM.

and suffocation), mummification and bondage; the list is by no means exhaustive. BDSM hopefully points towards the diversity of actions, and how no one act defines it. However, Stoller does deduce two common features from the assorted activities: they involve ‘suffering, not necessarily pain in the usual sense’ (1991, 14) and they stress ‘the gross, dramatized expression of powerlessness for the participant playing the bottom role and of power for the designated top’ (1991, 14). From such a conceptualization emanates my phrase the controlled body, for as investigators of the BDSM subculture have found, ‘At the very core of sadomasochism is not pain but the idea of control – dominance and submission’ (Weinberg and Kamel 1983a, 20).

As should be clear from my earlier comments, the controlled body is not limited to BDSM, and it can involve subjection against the victim’s will. Under these circumstances, a reading involving BDSM may exist, but its aesthetic and symbolic properties will be clouded behind a narrative that insists it is sadism. No real-life BDSM ‘scene’ involves torture.⁹ Although I will discuss the essential qualities of BDSM as a social practice in Chapter 2, it is imperative I point out that a fundamental tenet of BDSM is consent. Weinberg and Kamel highlight that ‘S&M scenarios are *willingly and cooperatively* produced; more often than not it is the *masochist’s* fantasies that are acted out’ (1983a, 20). I recognize the importance of the consent in BDSM procedures, but, as we shall see, the fantasy space of the cinema allows BDSM readings when consent is not present. In addition, the controlled body can be other things: a canvas for adornment, a place of manipulation, a space for punishment, a site for mutilation, and a body that revels in its physicality. In all cases though, the body is established as a location for defining and denying identity, but also a space that is encoded with cultural significance.

⁹ Stressing its performative qualities, the term ‘scene’ is used for the engagement in actual BDSM acts.

Each of the four main chapters of the thesis is structured in a similar manner. Following Chapter 1, which provides an account of the existing critical literature that touches on the topic of the controlled body, the chapters concentrate on one of four strands of representation of painful pleasures: BDSM, body modification, the serial killer's murder scene and its investigation, and dangerous games. The first part of each chapter situates the themes and concepts within their respective contemporary practices and the cinematic history of such representations. The second part of each chapter contains a number of case studies. Examining cinematic instances of the relevant topics, I apply the socially constructed and negotiated meanings from earlier in the chapter alongside textual analysis to provoke an interdisciplinary understanding of the spectacle of the controlled body.

The controlled body is not a gendered body, and I deal with both the suffering male and female body in my thesis. But the gender of the subject can have important interpretive elements, especially in respect of masochism. The tortured male hero, seen throughout cinema history, has remained problematic for the conception of the binary assumption of active male/passive female, especially in respect of gendering the spectator's gaze (see Willemen 1981; Neale 1983; Hutchings 1993b; P. Smith 1993). Many of the controlled body films have explored the latent male masochism, and positioned it in the foreground to suggest its necessity in the formation of masculinity. Thus, although the controlled body is not exclusively the male body, the figure of a man choosing passivity and pain brings an additional charge, and is a strand of investigation that runs throughout the research, and has special prominence in Chapters 2 and 5.

A study of BDSM provides the basis of Chapter 2. I signal how BDSM interpretations can and have been drawn from a range of films throughout the history of cinema, but note that its themes have become increasingly prominent. I proceed by

constructing a formulation of BDSM as an activity founded on consensual control, which revels in performed pain and subjection, but argue that mainstream cinema has nearly always imposed a different interpretation on its pleasures. Employing case studies of *8mm* (Joel Schumacher, USA, 1999) and *Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan, Supermasochist* (Kirby Dick, USA, 1997), I focus on the construction of BDSM as a form of deviancy, and Hollywood's persistent denial of male masochism, whilst exploiting its representation.

Chapter 3 offers a reading of body modification as an example of controlling the body. Continuing themes of painful mastery and masochistic pleasures from Chapter 2, I charge mainstream cinema with largely rejecting the social significance of marking and modifying the flesh, and instead imposing a coercive framework. In addition, the adornment of the body prompts questions of beauty and deformity, a conundrum that pervades the extreme body modifications of the case study films: *Tattoo, Boxing Helena* and *Crash* (David Cronenberg, Canada, 1996).

I begin Chapter 4 by contemplating how murder, and in particular, serial killing, has been associated with art, and how art has traditionally drawn on the suffering body for inspiration. These reflections are followed by an examination of films such as *Se7en* (David Fincher, USA, 1995), *The Bone Collector* (Phillip Noyce, USA, 1999) and *Resurrection* (Russell Mulcahy, USA, 1999). Featuring the serial killer as an artist of death, someone that flamboyantly designs the murder scene, I scrutinise how the investigator reveals meanings from the aesthetics of suffering. Finally, I postulate a specifically masochistic role for the detective examining the murder scene, a process that in the subgenre of the artistic serial killer obliges the spectator to contemplate the controlled body of victimhood via a tangible association. In all chapters, the suffering act and the act of suffering are both aestheticized spectacle and the structuring part of the narrative, but in the subgenre of the artistic serial

killer, the configuration reaches its zenith.

Guided by studies of video games and extreme sports, and drawing on the work of Johan Huizinga (1970) and Roger Caillois (1961), I dwell in detail in Chapter 5 on two films by David Fincher: *The Game* and *Fight Club*. The study prompts a return to some of the issues regarding the display of male masochism discussed in Chapter 2, but rather than explicit BDSM, I focus on the realm of play, including sport and games. Like BDSM, play has specific rules that guide and force different interpretations of actions. As specifically controlled arenas, they offer spaces to abandon personal control, and enjoy masochistic pleasures of danger and pain.

In conjunction with each other, the four chapters reveal the cinematic depictions of the controlled body to be a fertile site to explore contemporary attitudes towards the body and selfhood. Tracking the culturally prevalent masochistic desire for ordeals and discomfort, both within the narratives and the spectacles, I ask what the films might tell us about a search for autonomy, but also a need to experience sensations to feel alive. By uncovering mainstream contemporary cinema's fascination for suffering, I ponder the pleasures of pain.

1. Situating the Controlled Body

This is my body, and I may as well say, well, I'm not gonna get another one, so I'm gonna use this one until it's all used up.

Bob Flanagan in *Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan, Supermasochist*

With the body as one of the key areas of debate in the late twentieth century, there has been an abundance of scholarly texts exploring the topic. Issues of the body, especially body image and its representation, have been foundational not only to gender studies, but broader cultural, social, historical, and anthropological work. My research into the cinematic spectacle of the controlled body in films of the last twenty years is grounded in these debates. Indeed, many of the films I discuss appear to address these very discourses whilst perpetuating them in the cinematic domain. Yet, through being such an amorphous topic, I have found no focus in the pre-existing work, rather a range of disciplines and debates that touch upon my thesis. Indeed, part of the process of reviewing the literature was a defining of my area of investigation, at least in respect of how the controlled body draws on existing discourses. For this reason, after firstly considering deliberations in film studies about the body, the remainder of this chapter examines work in allied fields that had, *prima facie*, an affiliation with the controlled body. These debates I have grouped together under four headings: imagining BDSM, body image culture, art and the performance of suffering, and playing games.

I have sought out texts that permit socio-cultural rather than psycho-symbolic meanings. Initially it appeared that the coexisting concepts of power and control naturally lent themselves towards a Foucauldian analysis. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1991), Foucault enunciates discourses on the topic of the human body and its control. In particular, he deliberates on the replacement of the spectacle of the scaffold by both the discreet punishment of the penal system (1991,

104-131) and surveillance (1991, 195-228), whilst offering the concept of the docile body to aid our understanding of the means of control (1991, 135-169). Crime is thus ascribed usefulness: it prompts and justifies a monitoring of all. Within the cinematic depictions of the controlled body, examples of such strategies are evident: BDSM is usually defined as dangerous and so we are encouraged to be vigilant over such activities, whilst the investigator in the artistic serial killer films is defined as an indispensable observer. Foucault has also argued in both *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* and *The History of Sexuality* (1990) that power is not held, it is a network of relationships. Structurally, what this provides is a model that can account for oscillations in the positions of power in cinematic images of control, and fluctuations in spectatorial identification between the ‘victim’ and the ‘victimizer’. Moreover, Foucault’s work, through being explicitly concerned with images of punishment, relates directly to the remit of my thesis. However, my work is far from a direct Foucauldian approach, which would have necessitated my study remaining at the theoretical level. Instead, I have incorporated sociological and cultural perspectives that directly engage with practitioners of painful pursuits, and these form the framework for my hypothesis of the pleasures of the controlled body.

Also at the level of theory, I have found Elaine Scarry’s *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985) a suitable point of departure from psychoanalysis. Scarry accurately articulates the conceptual difficulties associated with pain. As mentioned in my introduction, Scarry records the ‘unsharability’ of pain (1985, 4), but she also notes that, ‘To have pain is to have *certainty*; to hear about pain is to have *doubt*’ (1985, 13). Depictions of the controlled body exploit this gap: it is conceivable that the sensation a character is depicted experiencing may be a pleasure, and not the pain it appears to be, because we are not confronted by any physical experience. But the films also attempt to bridge the gap to prompt reciprocal

sensations for the spectator. As I will address in Chapter 4 in respect of serial killer films, the spectator is encouraged to have a sensorial relationship, beyond seeing, with the film. In addition, Scarry's work has relevance to the whole thesis, even though her project is different to mine, analysing as she does, the all-consuming nature of pain, and how it destroys the self and our natural creativeness. Thus, Scarry characterizes pain by its 'sheer aversiveness' (1985, 52). Indeed, Scarry does not deal with the pleasures of BDSM, or any other such sensations, and perhaps quite rightly so, for they are not truly pain. In effect, Scarry's description establishes a classification that can profitably be used to define these painful pleasures against. Rather than being averse to it, the subjection and endurance of the controlled body is an exquisite pain: something enjoyed and even desired.

The Body and Film Studies

Cinema has not been overlooked during the growth in critical debates surrounding the body, but the work has tended to be linked either to specific genres or the broad issue of identity, rather than cross-genre themes.¹ Yvonne Tasker's *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (1993) is a case in point. Addressing the then neglected genre of the action film, she explores the pleasures of the commodified body, especially the male physique, and prompts an inquiry into issues of gendering and racially defining the active body. Containing traces of my survey, notably in respect of pleasures for the audience based around the representation of the spectacular body, Tasker is not explicitly concerned with the controlled body.

¹ For example, in the case of genre see the work on horror discussed later, but also the body in science fiction, especially the cyborg, in J.P. Telotte's *Replications: A Robotic History of the Science Fiction Film* (1995) and Claudia Springer's *Electronic Eros: Bodies and Desire in the Postindustrial Age* (1996). The published work on the body and identity in cinema is vast, but a sense of its broad sweep is indicated by the collection of essays edited by Christine Gledhill entitled *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (1991). Chris Straayer's *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies: Sexual Re-Orientations in Film and Video* (1996) and Stella Bruzzi's *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies* (1997).

Indeed, the notion of the body being acted upon, either by the self, or by another person, where concepts of pleasure and pain are blurred, has been largely overlooked in film studies.

Several texts that deal with the body and cinema do, however, introduce concepts and approaches that allow me to situate my work. It is noteworthy that these have also tended to be concentrated on singular topics, making it appropriate to split them into three categories: the male body, the horrific body and the serial killer genre. However, one significant exception to such specificity is Michele Aaron's edited collection of essays *The Body's Perilous Pleasures: Dangerous Desires and Contemporary Culture* (1999), which brings together diverse cultural images and activities that are deemed dangerous, whether socially, legally or politically. Not all of the articles contend directly with the issue of the body and cinema,² but the efficacy of the book is its very eclecticism, for it acts as a forum to develop a notion of danger to the body that moves away from the limitations of genre and/or activity, and which is structured around a relationship between representation and reception.

As Aaron describes them:

Perilous pleasures ... refer to the blatant activities or images of horror, suspense and eroticism on the screen or page, but they also pertain to the consumer of these representations, whose desires are met or activated by them, whose desires determine their production and popularity. (1998, 2)

Thus, the concept of the body's perilous pleasures acts as a vehicle to recognize culturally accepted relationships between diverse activities and images. These overarching connections proliferate around the controlled body, and it is a similarly diverse understanding of a topic that I have attempted to achieve in this research.

² In addition to articles on David Cronenberg (L.R. Williams 1999), pornographic movies (Krzywinska 1999), and the imagery of AIDS (Pearl 1999), there are essays on cyborg fiction (Mason 1999), representations of children (Petley 1999) and (as discussed later) tattooing (Sweetman 1999a).

The Male Body

My rationale for isolating the male body as an area of research touching on my study is that while at times the gendering of the controlled body appears subsidiary to other factors, the controlled male body poses significant issues in respect of traditional conceptions of masculinity and empowerment. Under the direct influence of feminist, gay and lesbian, and race studies, the representation(s) of masculinity have undergone scrutiny, both theoretically, as I will discuss below, but also via changes in portrayals. The latter explicitly coincides with the depictions of the controlled body, which frequently seem to be reacting with male stereotypes.

In film studies, consideration of the male body has repeatedly operated through a reappraisal of Laura Mulvey's assertion in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975) that the female is exclusively the object of the male gaze. Steve Neale in 'Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema' (1983) argues that there is narcissistic identification between the male spectator and the male body on the screen, and that because of conventions in a heterosexual and patriarchal society, the male body cannot be explicitly erotic for the male gaze, so it is repressed. The scenes therefore take on ritualized and fetishistic elements to legitimate the interest in the hero and his body. Applying Neale's work to images of male suffering, I am able to offer a reading that suggests the controlled body is such a vehicle of disavowal. However, I will also assert that under certain conditions (excessive spectacle, inter-textual framework, spectatorial appropriation), the avowal of eroticized male suffering overwhelms the disavowal. Furthermore, there are rare instances in some recent films where a masochistic pleasure in pain is readily acknowledged.

Kenneth MacKinnon in *Uneasy Pleasures: The Male as Erotic Object* examines male objectification and concludes that it is not new, but has become more apparent

through the existence of a desiring female gaze, and a commodification of the male body that avoids any threat to patriarchy by linking the look to 'an equal-opportunities policy as regards the commodification of the sexes' (1997, 191). However, as part of his study (see also MacKinnon 1999), MacKinnon demonstrates the disavowal discussed by Neale. Thus, MacKinnon describes seminars where his students were receptive to the idea of multiple readings of texts, but either denied that the male body was eroticized, or believed the eroticism was only felt by others. MacKinnon therefore discloses the persistence of the disavowal, and conversely, the 'necessity' to disguise the eroticism within the narrative.

Richard Dyer in 'Don't Look Now' (1982) also examines the objectification of the male body, but in a related topic. Contrasting the male and female pin-up, he argues that the male body is objectified, but overcomes the female-associated passivity of its static representation by straining, heightened musculature, and engagement in 'masculine' pursuits. The notion of justified passivity is important to the controlled and restrained body, whilst Dyer's assertion that 'The penis can never live up to the mystique implied by the phallus' (1982, 71), although couched in psychoanalytical terms, uncovers the fragility of masculinity being founded on dominance. Bob Flanagan makes the same point, but more graphically, when he hammers a nail through his penis in *Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan, Supermasochist*.

Paul Smith continues the discussion of the male body in 'Eastwood Bound' (1993). Using Paul Willemen's 'Looking at the Male' (1981) and opposing Neale's argument that the male body is necessarily 'feminized' to enable objectification by a dominant male gaze, Smith still insists that homoeroticism is denied. What Smith brings to the argument is film scholarship debates surrounding masochism. Not accepting that masochism is the subversive element that Kaja Silverman discusses in

Male Subjectivity at the Margins (1992),³ Smith maintains that the masochism is negated within the conventional narrative by the protagonist's eventual triumphal empowerment. Thus, masochism is a steppingstone to the confirmation of patriarchal law.

More recently, Jeffrey A. Brown (2002) has applied a combination of the work of Willemen, Neale and Smith to discuss a pattern of torture and suffering endured by numerous characters played by Mel Gibson. Brown interprets the spectacular endurance of torment experienced by Gibson as indicating the necessity of both sadism and masochism in depicting a unified masculinity, whilst Gibson's resistance to pain confirms his authentic manliness and asserts his status as a heterosexual sex symbol. In other words, rather than men being defined by sadism, and women by masochism, suffering and powerlessness are important masculine traits. The image of the controlled male body, where subjection is specifically chosen, gives the belief in the necessity of male masochism even more credence.

By exploring the debates that have arisen in connection with the male body, it is possible to distinguish how central the two notions of disavowed eroticism and the active (controlling) male are to masculinity in mainstream cinema. Although the critical texts recognize the instabilities in these positions and means to read around (or against them), they stress their enduring appearance in narratives. Both situations are crucial to my study, but whereas up until now the debate has primarily focused on the latent homoeroticism, my thesis will extend the debate into the equally threatening notions of BDSM's gender instability, and explicit male masochism.

The Horrific Body

The 1970s saw what Robin Wood calls 'the Golden Age of the American horror

³ I will say more about Kaja Silverman's work in respect of masochism later in this chapter.

film' (1986, 70). The success of these films and the growth in studies of popular culture in the 1980s prompted a recognition of this most visceral and corporeal of genres. Consequently, alongside Wood charting the broad relationship of horror to repression, the family and American culture, there emerged a substantial amount of work on the modern American horror film (see Neale 1981; Grant 1984; Twitchell 1985; Waller 1987). But it is only those studies that discuss the range of films collectively known as body horror, and the allied group of films featuring disfigurement, that have a direct bearing on the controlled body.

Philip Brophy in 'Horrority - The Textuality of Contemporary Horror Films' (1986) situates the visibility of horror in relation to the improvement in special effects and the self-referential quality of the text. Pete Boss in 'Vile Bodies and Bad Medicine' (1986) is similarly concerned with visibility, in particular of the body, and relates it to modern technology, especially medicine. The product of Boss's pairing is an analysis of the technophobic fear of the body being acted on by external agencies. Both essays therefore accurately locate the visual and narrative style of body horror as stressing the body out of control rather than the body being controlled. Thus, unlike the controlled body, which aligns itself with a social discourse that sees the corporeal as an essence and statement of being, their concern is for the lack of autonomy and a fear of the corporeal. Furthermore, body horror's emphasis on the body's transformation (for example, the creature emerging from John Hurt's stomach in *Alien* (Ridley Scott, UK, 1979)), stresses the act, whilst, as we shall see, especially in relation to the artistic serial killer, the controlled body more usually accents the aftermath. However, body horror's very recognition of the physicality of the human frame makes it a forerunner of the controlled body.

It is also relevant to note that the emphasis on the horror of the body took on a specific gender slant in the early 1990s. Whereas feminist studies had largely

concentrated on ascertaining the relationship between the punishment of the female body and the female spectator (see Williams 1984), Carol Clover in *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992) relates it to the male spectator. Employing psychoanalytic theory whilst gendering the slasher killers and the 'Final Girl', Clover argues the male gaze must contain an element of masochism through identification with the potential victim. Barbara Creed's study *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993) similarly questions whether women are exclusively positioned as passive victims in horror films. Engaging with Julia Kristeva's conceptualization of the abject, Creed argues that the monstrous-feminine 'speaks to us more about male fears than about female desire or feminine subjectivity' (1993, 7). In 'Masculinity and the Horror Film', Peter Hutchings (1993b) also identifies the female monster, and deduces that the male spectator, through empathizing with the disempowerment on the screen, experiences masochistic pleasures. All three pieces raise concerns regarding stable identification, and recognize the importance of masochistic pleasure for the spectator. Similar issues also arise in respect of the controlled body, where spectatorial pleasure frequently lies in images of suffering, but with the potential for even greater masochistic identification when the protagonist is seen as somehow finding pleasure in that pain. Part of my project is therefore to examine what fears and pleasures the controlled body might speak of.

Debates surrounding spectatorial pleasure were continued by Isabel Pinedo in *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing* (1997). Pinedo articulates the pleasure of submitting to tension and fear, and the importance of inter and extra-textual knowledge. Moving away from solely a masochistic theory of pleasure, and concentrating on the female spectator, Pinedo's work is productive because it searches for the types of pleasures on offer for the audience when the film

depicts the body in pain.

Other studies have concentrated on the visualization of this pain. Both Linda Ruth Williams in 'An Eye for an Eye' (1994) and Ray Guins in 'Tortured Looks: Dario Argento and Visual Displeasure' (1996) choose the traditional metaphor of damage to the eye in the narrative as a means to access the assault on the spectator (see also Clover 1992, 166-230). The serial killer films that feature in my inquiry take the aestheticizing of pain in a different direction though. Rather than damage to the eye, the crime scene both assaults the eye via shock, and is horrifically pleasing in its formal beauty. Furthermore, the requirement of investigation necessitates our gaze.

Of course, the horrific body is not limited to horror films. Whatever disrupts or alters the human form, in particular where it discloses our corporeality, is usually depicted as malignant. Only directly relevant to my chapter on body modification, where I examine the deliberate refigurement of the human body as an act of control, the depiction of disability has an impact on my work via its correlation to pain. Falling into two categories, content analysis (Cumberbatch and Negrine 1992) and a cinematic history of representation (Norden 1994; Hunter 1995; Pointon with Davies 1997), the studies define a tradition of representing disability in terms of rejection and loathing, or pity and shame, which, as I will demonstrate in my thesis, contrasts sharply with the eroticized and desirable images of *Crash*. What is made evident is how significant the act of control is in defining what is aesthetically acceptable and pleasing in the human body: by being consciously chosen, what is usually deemed disfigurement takes on the quality of beauty, whilst, as witnessed in *Tattoo*, forced body adornment becomes a mutilation.

The Serial Killer Genre

The serial killer has become a familiar cinematic figure since the 1970s as part of a process that has imbued the murderer with cult status. Books such as *The A to Z Encyclopedia of Serial Killers* (Schechter and Everitt 1996), *The Encyclopedia of Serial Killers* (Newton 2000) and *Bad Blood: An Illustrated Guide to Psycho Cinema* (Fuchs 2002) are part of an ever-growing collection of texts that provide reference details of actual killers alongside accounts of their fictional counterparts. Academic works have also made the link (see Levin and Fox 1985, 3-7), with Mark Seltzer characterizing the interest as part of America's '*wound culture*: the public fascination with torn and open bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound' (1998, 1). Seltzer classes the wound as a literal example of the making public of private interiors: a process he sees, in a Foucauldian manner, as emerging from the reclassification of crime and sexual acts in the nineteenth century. The serial killer is an example of what Seltzer calls 'The spectacular public representation of violated bodies' (1998, 21), which alongside talk shows, films, art exhibitions, and even this thesis, situate the violently transgressed body as a means of understanding private, public, and social identity.

The expansive work on serial killers also includes those by ex-FBI profilers (Ressler and Shachtman 1992; Douglas and Munn 1992), and academics seeking to situate current representations of murderers within a lineage of depictions in art, literature and film (see J. Black 1991; Tatar 1995; Simpson 2000), of which I will say more later on in this chapter. For now, I wish to concentrate on those originating within the discipline of film studies.

In 'The Criminal Psychopath as Hollywood Hero' (1981), Wayne J. Douglass charts the progression from the cinematic gangster of the 1930s to the psychopathic hero of the 1970s. What Douglass notes is the allegiance between the two

characterizations in the heroic guise of a desire to emerge from the anonymity of the crowd. By 1991, Amy Taubin was noting that the cinematic psychopath had been subsumed into the mantle of serial killer, but was no less heroic in his way. Films such as *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (John McNaughton, USA, 1990) and *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, USA, 1991) built on the narrative heritage of *M* (Fritz Lang, Germany, 1931) and *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1960) whilst developing the appeal of the psycho killers of countless slasher films. Essentially exploring male violence through the films, Taubin also highlights what for my research is a more significant concern, namely the emphasis on the serial killer, both within the narrative and extra-textually, to the point where, in the case of *The Silence of the Lambs*, the central protagonist Clarice is eclipsed by Hannibal Lecter in the public debates.⁴ Taubin aligns this with the fact that the serial killer has become a subject of fascination throughout the media, featuring in true-crime television and novels such as *American Psycho* (B.E. Ellis 1991). Furthermore, the serial killer is now regarded as a product of the American heartlands, who roams freely, virtually undetectable, through the sprawling suburbs.

Being undetectable is not the same as being anonymous though. Richard Dyer in 'Kill and Kill Again' (1997) discusses the search for patterns in serial killings. Crucial for the investigative narrative (and storytelling generally), the serial structure, Dyer asserts, being based as it is on repetition and anticipation, has become 'a reigning principle of cultural production' under capitalism (1997, 14). In fiction, the seriality can be taken beyond the basic pattern of repetition (who is killed, how they are killed, etc.), to a heightened sequence where the pattern is only discernible after all (or nearly all) the killings have taken place. For Dyer, the centrality of

⁴ The importance of *The Silence of the Lambs* in shaping the depictions and studies of serial killers is evident in the number of texts addressing it. Of particular note are those by Staiger (1993), Halberstam (1995) and Tasker (2002).

seriality in these narratives is a reassurance: it provides a motive that negates the unacceptably terrifying prospect of killing for killing's sake. What it also provides though, and this is the point of departure for my thesis, is a *raison d'être* for spectacular murders that highlight the killer's control over the victim, the investigators and the audience. What is more, through the murders being aestheticized, the crime scene has displaced the serial killer as the object of fascination, so what was once profane is now linked to the profound. This embellishment to the point of revelation perhaps reached its zenith in *Se7en*, and did not go unnoticed by critics (Taubin 1996; Dyer 1999), but subsequent films have been dismissed.⁵ By so doing, the subgenre, and its position within the broader allure of the dominated body, has been lost. One of the aims of my thesis is therefore to redress this situation.

A relatively small number of works do critically discuss the artistry of the serial killer, although without explicitly engaging with the notion of the controlled body. Patrice Fleck examines the marks on the murder victim's body as a form of language that offers clues, and regards the serial killer film as providing a 'conservative analysis of crime that deliberately foregoes looking in the direction of economics and poverty in lieu of some displaced focus on the family and morality' (1995/96, 35). Alison Young (1996), whilst offering an illuminating study of literature, criminology, justice and the failure of institutions to find solutions to issues of criminality, similarly sees the crime scene as a space that requires reading. In a more direct examination of the aestheticization of the crime scene, Todd F. Tietchen positions the 'killer as intertextual artist' (1998), and argues the depiction is part of a mediation on the serial killer that samples and copycats, whilst blurring

⁵ An editorial in *Sight and Sound* in January 2000 describes the subgenre as being comprised of films that 'betray the influence (without the talent) of Fincher's serial-killer movie *Se7en*' (*Sight and Sound* 2000, 3).

representations of the real. More aligned with my study, Steven Jay Schneider (2001) elucidates that a range of films have portrayed the serial killer as artist, and proposes a schema that distinguishes murder as artistic product from murder as artistic performance.

Although I will contest some of their findings, these writers have made the link between the pain of victimhood and the pleasure of artistry. Along with the aforementioned debates regarding the representation of the male body, and the horrific body, they are the closest film studies has come to examining cinematic interpretations of contemporary painful pursuits undertaken as proof of autonomy and vitality. What I bring to the argument is a framework that sees these films as part of a wider range of discourses that place the marked and controlled body at the centre of a pleasure in pain. Considerations of BDSM, body image, art and performance, and game playing, all tackle issues of pleasurable pain and link into the controlled body, so a discussion of the arguments surrounding these four areas of investigation forms the remainder of this chapter.

Imagining BDSM

A major difference between my thesis and most pre-existing work in film studies is my discussion of sadism, masochism, and sadomasochism via BDSM, for I attempt to move the debate from psychoanalytic theory to cultural experience. Directly engaging with notions of pain, and foundational to most considerations of painful pleasures, BDSM requires a thorough investigation, a consequence of which might be an eschewing of importance away from the remaining three topics of body image, art and games. This is not my intention though, for all four categories have a major role to play in the subject of the controlled body. However, the wealth of material published on what is usually called sadomasochism, and the predominance of a

specific mode of understanding it, makes it important to appreciate where my arguments and beliefs originate, and how they differ from the prevalent conceptions of these themes.

Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1991) seeks to account for the origins of beliefs concerning rituals, forbidden social activities and notions of uncleanness of the body. In a chapter entitled 'External Boundaries', Douglas rejects the misapprehension that personal rituals should be interpreted differently to public rituals. As Douglas clarifies:

Public rituals may express public concerns when they use inanimate door posts or animal sacrifices: but public rituals enacted on the human body are taken to express personal and private concerns. There is no possible justification for this shift of interpretation just because the rituals work upon human flesh. (1991, 115)

Douglas's comments compel her to reject an interpretation of rituals from 'primitive' cultures as corresponding to 'infantile stages in the development of the human psyche' (1991, 115), declaring 'Psychological explanations cannot of their nature account for what is culturally distinctive' (1991, 121). Similarly, I contend that for the study of BDSM in contemporary cinema, a dependence on psychoanalysis (with its emphasis on repeating infantile events) is not appropriate; instead, we need to focus on the subcultural meanings of BDSM and relate them to the broader society.

However, such an objective is not an easy undertaking. BDSM in the movies is under-explored, whilst when it is investigated, it is usually applied to the structures of spectatorship, and the dynamics of BDSM as a socially coded interaction are understated in comparison with the psychoanalytic readings. Applying Freudian/Lacanian theories is understandable though; BDSM as a subcultural pursuit has been a persistent blind spot in theories of sadomasochism, with the focus being on psychoanalytical and psychosexual meanings, not socially determined ones. As

Weinberg and Falk have stated: ‘The influence of such writers as Krafft-Ebing ... and Sigmund Freud ... may have been to obscure the social aspects of this [BDSM] behavior by defining it solely in terms of individual pathology’ (1980, 149). What I therefore maintain needs to be ascertained is the types of power structures, meanings and roles explored via the controlled body in BDSM pursuits, and a comparison of these with the types of power structures, meanings and roles displayed in contemporary mainstream cinema. To make such a challenge we need to appreciate what needs to be overcome.

The terms sadism and masochism date back to 1885 and the first publication of psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s book *Psychopathia Sexualis*. Setting sadism in opposition to masochism, Krafft-Ebing derives the former from the Marquis de Sade, whose stories linked cruelty and pain with sexual pleasure. According to Krafft-Ebing, sadism is an atavistic sexual perversion organized around ‘an innate desire to humiliate, hurt, wound or even destroy others in order thereby to create sexual pleasure in one’s self’ (1998, 53). However, ‘In the civilized man of to-day, ... associations between lust and cruelty are found, but in a weak and rather rudimentary degree’ (1998, 54). Further, Krafft-Ebing recognizes that in ‘normal’ sexual activity lovers will ‘wrestle together “just for fun,” indulge in all sorts of horseplay’ (1998, 53), and ‘in sexual heat will strike, bite or pinch the other’ (1998, 53). From these impulses can be traced the more extreme sadism.

Categorizing the regression to the sadistic impulse as originating in ‘psychical degeneration’ (1998, 54), Krafft-Ebing believes it corresponds to a natural division of aggression and submissiveness between men and women: ‘In the intercourse of the sexes, the active or aggressive *rôle* belongs to man; woman remains passive, defensive’ (1998, 56). With such reasoning, Krafft-Ebing declares, ‘Woman no doubt derives pleasure from her innate coyness and the final victory of man affords

her intense and refined gratification' (1998, 54).

Through his medicalized approach, Krafft-Ebing constructs a separation whereby sadism is linked to a natural male response of aggression, whilst masochism is divorced from 'normal' male sexuality. Simplistically, a male sadist is merely taking things too far, whilst a male masochist is eschewing the rules. Sigmund Freud saw sadism in similar terms. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, first published in 1910,⁶ Freud states: 'The sexuality of most male human beings contains an element of *aggressiveness* – a desire to subjugate' (1953, 71), and it is grounded in the biological need for 'overcoming the resistance of the sexual object' (1953, 71). Sadism, then, is only 'an aggressive component of the sexual instinct which has become independent and exaggerated' (1953, 71). However, both Freud and Krafft-Ebing had to contend with case studies that revealed large numbers of male masochists.

Krafft-Ebing defined masochism as being 'controlled by the idea of being completely and unconditionally subject to the will of a person of the opposite sex; of being treated by this person as by a master, humiliated and abused' (1998, 86).⁷ The word itself, like sadism, is derived from literature, being extrapolated from Leopold von Sacher-Masoch who 'made this perversion ... the substratum of his writings' (Krafft-Ebing 1998, 87). In spite of borrowing from his work, Krafft-Ebing was unable to accept the sadistic women Sacher-Masoch described, women such as Wanda in *Venus in Furs* who declares:

a diabolical curiosity has taken hold of me; ... I have a dreadful desire to see you tremble under my whip, to see you suffer, to hear at last your moans and screams, your cries for mercy, while I go on whipping you without pity, until you lose consciousness. (Sacher-Masoch 1989, 186-187)

⁶ Although first published in 1910, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* underwent a series of changes in a succession of editions during the next twenty years.

⁷ As Krafft-Ebing's stressing of the opposite sex suggests, he saw homosexuality alongside sadism and masochism as a sexual perversion.

Krafft-Ebing's reticence to accept female sadism conforms to the gender divide he placed on aggression. His opinion was carried forward into much of the later work on sadism and masochism.

Freud initially concluded masochism in the male was 'further removed from the normal sexual aim than its counterpart [sadism]' (1953, 71). However, what distinguishes his view from Krafft-Ebing's is his belief that:

A sadist is always at the same time a masochist, although the active or the passive aspect of the perversion may be the more strongly developed in him and may represent his predominant sexual activity. (1953, 73)

Like Freud, Havelock Ellis disputes the distinction between sadism and masochism, stating they 'may be regarded as complementary emotional states; they cannot be regarded as opposed states' (1983, 33). His view pre-empted more recent studies of participants in BDSM activities: Andreas Spengler found 'Most sadomasochists, heterosexuals as well as homosexuals, alternate between these [active/passive, sadist/masochist] roles' (1977, 66); G. W. Levi Kamel in his study of leathersex (gay BDSM) discovered 'the most exciting S [top] has also served as an M [bottom], and the best M is capable of the S role' (Kamel 1983b, 171); and speaking on the television programme *Tokyo Bound* (2000), professional dominatrix and writer on BDSM, MaxX, affirmed 'the best mistresses learn by being submissive'. Yet the gendering of sadism and masochism persists, as have the psychoanalytical theories, and these are what film studies has employed when considering spectatorial identification.

Foundational to debates surrounding masochism and cinema is Kaja Silverman's 'Masochism and Subjectivity' (1980). In an essay that typifies the dominant psychoanalytical approach, Silverman interprets Freud's account of his grandson's

fort/da game and Lacan's theory of the mirror stage,⁸ and examines the belief that pleasure is founded on repeating those painful moments of separation and loss that form subjectivity. Instead of seeing loss being mastered linguistically, and a pleasure deriving from that, Silverman posits 'it is the pleasure of passivity, of subject-ion' that is produced (1980, 3). Thus, Silverman declares that 'the fascination of the sadistic point of view is merely that it provides the best vantage point from which to watch the masochistic story unfold' (1980, 5). Continuing with an analysis of *Il portiere di notte/The Night Porter* (Liliana Cavani, Italy, 1973), Silverman's article reinterprets the film as both expressing male masochism, and asserting the oscillation between active and passive roles; but her emphasis remains on the relationship between the subject and the symbolic.

Using the work by Gilles Deleuze (1989) on de Sade and Sacher-Masoch, Gaylyn Studlar in 'Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema' (1984) applies the notion of the masochistic fantasy (based upon agreement and the assumption of the childlike state of being controlled) to the spectatorial position. Through being associated with a pre-genital stage of identification and desire, this concept of masochism dispenses with gender divisions, and invites a consideration of viewing pleasures based not on mastery of the gaze but submission to the gaze.⁹ Also interesting for emphasizing the importance of ritual and repetition in the act of masochism, Studlar still takes a much more psychoanalytical approach to masochism than I.

In the chapters that follow, I replace the purely theoretical with an examination of the rituals and practices of control and subjection that define masochistic pleasures for their participants. Although film studies has not reflected it, other types of

⁸ See, for example, Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1955) and Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* (1977).

⁹ Silverman later contested Studlar's research for conflating 'Deleuze's oral mother with the pre-Oedipal mother of object relations psychoanalysis' (1992, 417, n50).

discourse do exist around sadism and masochism via a consideration of BDSM as a physical pursuit: it is regarded as a result of childhood trauma and requiring observation which may aid treatment (Stoller 1991), a paradoxical but transgressive pleasure (MacKendrick 1999), and a (body) political act (see Merck 1993; Thompson 1994).

Particularly useful to my project is Anne McClintock's 'Maid to Order: Commercial S/M and Gender Power' (1993), in which she scrutinizes the social treatment and the cultural significance of BDSM. Exploring the demonizing of BDSM, McClintock summarizes the false categorization of male masochism as perverse, and reveals the ritualized basis upon which BDSM is acted and policed.

Admirable for dispelling the myth that sadism infuses consensual BDSM, what is not considered by McClintock is the powerful dynamic between cinematic depictions of sadistic control, and the evoked reading of BDSM pleasure that runs parallel to the narrative. Falk and Weinberg (1983) note this bond as part of their broader study of BDSM and its place in popular Western culture. As important as their essay is, and I do draw upon it for various cultural precursors to BDSM becoming a common feature in contemporary mainstream cinema, it is only one of a number of extremely insightful essays collected together by Weinberg and Kamel in *S and M: Studies in Sadomasochism* (1983b). The contributions included are wide and varied. An empirical study by Andreas Spengler (1977) challenges assumptions of BDSM by analysing what pleasures and activities are engaged in. Thomas Weinberg (1978) attempts an understanding of BDSM within the frame analysis perspective developed by sociologist Erving Goffman, which sees human interaction being 'framed' by social definitions that provide specific contextual meaning to behaviour. Consequently, the importance of performance in BDSM is examined, and for my research, it prompts issues of dramatizing control via costume, paraphernalia

and excess. Other essays valuably explore the social organization of BDSM. These challenge the frequently equated image of random violence by finding BDSM to be a controlled and rational activity that is socially meaningful (Weinberg and Falk 1980; Kamel 1983b; Lee 1983).

In conjunction with a study by Hopkins (1994), as well as one by Hart and Dale, who contend that BDSM is ‘less a polarized expression of a master’s power over a slave than a mutual exchange of power’ (1997, 345), I am able to locate some of the painful pleasures possible in BDSM, and assess how the cinematic controlled body confirms or denies them. Such a socially and culturally grounded model of BDSM allows a fresh interpretation of how we understand and use cinematic images of suffering.

Body Image Culture

Prior to the 1980s, most scholarly work that discussed body modification concentrated on examples in non-Western societies (Lévi-Strauss 1963; Polhemus 1978). But the penultimate decade of the last century witnessed an explosion of interest in how and why these techniques were becoming more prolific in Western societies. Arnold Rubin’s edited collection of essays *Marks of Civilization: Artistic Transformations of the Human Body* (1988) became a foundational text on body art, and encompassed anthropological, sociological, art historical and folkloric approaches to the topic. Considering body modification as a meaningful act involving beliefs and cultural significance, the collection examined both non-Western societies and the tattoo renaissance in the USA. The following year, Sanders’s book *Customizing the Body: The Art and Culture of Tattooing* (1989) offered an overview of the development of a specific body modification practice in Western society, whilst Vale and Juno produced *Modern Primitives: An Investigation*

of *Contemporary Adornment & Ritual* (1989b), which brought together a mix of anthropological inquiry and anecdotal interviews on themes of tattooing, piercing, scarification and body adornment. Considering the subcultural significance of a range of body modifications, Vale and Juno's collection of essays sought comparisons between historic and contemporary practices in the formation of the concept of Modern Primitivism, and investigated shifts in attitudes towards ritual and the control of the human body.

Subsequently, numerous academic books and articles have been produced on the subject (for example Mascia-Lees and Sharpe 1992c; Myers 1992; Caplan 2000), as well as a whole issue of *Body and Society*. In the latter, Christian Klesse (1999) and Bryan S. Turner (1999) challenge the appropriateness and accuracy of the concept of Modern Primitivism: the former arguing it is a postcolonial process of 'othering', the latter suggesting the change in social context so transforms the meaning of marking the body to make the comparison erroneous.

What is helpful for my research is that the debates engage with the values embedded in acts of body modification in contemporary society, and therefore offer a sounding board for my discussions of body modification in films. In particular, David Curry, in 'Decorating the Body Politic' (1993), suggests the pleasures of bodily control for the participants, and differentiates the motivation of fashionable display from that of BDSM experience. Paul Sweetman also examines the significance of fashion in 'Anchoring the (Postmodern) Self? Body Modification, Fashion and Identity' (1999b). Through a collection of interviews with a variety of body modifiers, he argues tattoos and piercings share affinities and differences with other contemporary body projects, frequently acting as anti-fashion and a means to construct a sense of identity. In both articles, a strong emphasis is placed on the physical sensations involved.

In 'Only Skin Deep? Tattooing, Piercing and the Transgressive Body' (1999a), Sweetman goes further in his analysis of the physical experience of body modification, and asserts that the act involves not a control over the body, but a control of it, whereby its sensitivity is intensified and the meaning of the natural (interior/exterior, male/female) is brought into question. Susan Benson has extended the debate in more anthropological language in 'Inscriptions of the Self: Reflections on Tattooing and Piercing in Contemporary Euro-America' (2000), whilst pressurizing Westernized conceptions of the body and self.

Also pertinent in respect of debates about body image is the disabled body (see Cash and Pruzinsky 1990; Barton 1996; Davis 1997). Both Tom Shakespeare (1996) and Rosemarie Garland Thomson (1997) scrutinize the perception and reality of sexuality and the disabled subject. Shakespeare concentrates on the potential power relationships that can develop, both negative, in terms of abuse (relating it to other sexual abuses of power), and positive, via a Foucauldian concept of resistance to power, and the exploratory unconventionality of sexual engagement. Thomson is expressly concerned with linking cultural discourses surrounding the female body with those relating to the disabled body, in particular through concepts of normalcy.

In essence, debates about body modification and the disabled body impinge on my discussion of the suffering body via their visualization of what can be painful conditions. In the case of body adornment, the body takes on the seemingly contradictory state of painful pleasure, which is a key feature of my thesis. Of similar importance, and as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, arguments centred on the disabled body bring to my work a difference between disfigurement and refigurement. Together, the two strands of the debate articulate contemporary attitudes towards imagery of the body in pain, and its relationship to control.

Art and the Performance of Suffering

The current interest in aestheticizing the suffering body is not limited to the cinema, as is attested by recent television programmes such as *Vile Bodies* (1998),¹⁰ *The South Bank Show: 'Body Art'* (1998), and *World of Pain* (2002), all of which highlight the notion of art and artistic performance of pain. To enable me to analyse the cinematic displays of the controlled body, I have drawn on contemporary debates in the fine arts where the suffering body has recently been brought to the fore through exhibitions such as *Spectacular Bodies* and renewed interest in anatomy as entertainment.¹¹

David Freedberg's inquiry in *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (1989) is founded on the ability of artistic images (paintings, sculptures, wax models, etc.) to create a response in the viewer. Freedberg's enterprise is to sketch the broadly recurrent responses (physical actions, beliefs, etc.) that have been recorded and recognized through history, but which have been overwhelmed by a valorization of a critical response derived from an aesthetic appreciation. Fundamentally, this has a considerable relevance to my work, not least because I am examining how graphic cinematic images are likely to affect the viewer, but also because the types of imagery in the films frequently mimic or refer to traditional iconography, whilst simultaneously referring to the image's historical legacy.

Nigel Spivey's *Enduring Creation: Art, Pain and Fortitude* (2001) functions as a complementary text to Freedberg's book, for both writers are concerned with images that display pain and the horrific in highly aestheticized ways: a feature that

¹⁰ Although *Vile Bodies* is comprised of three parts, only two of them, 'Naked' and 'The Dead' directly address the topic.

¹¹ The increased interest in anatomy fused with art is witnessed in the television documentaries *Raiders of the Human Body* (1998), *Anatomy of Disgust* - part 3 (2000) and *The Anatomists* (2002).

permeates the films of my inquiry. Spivey constructs a work of cultural history that blends the various approaches of art, philosophy, literature and history to negotiate the complex matrix of art and pain, and the associated qualities of beauty and disfigurement, horror and ecstasy. Unlike Freedberg, Spivey's emphasis is on the composition of the imagery, noting how art has frequently had recourse to apply accepted iconography to articulate concepts of suffering and pain. Spivey asks why artists have been preoccupied with showing suffering, what causes the images have been put to, and if pain can ever be beautiful. The artistic serial killer subgenre answers the latter in the affirmative, with, for example, *Blowback* (Mark L. Lester, Canada/USA, 1999) having the cathartic imagery of the martyred saints becoming the spectacle of death devised by a serial killer.

The premise that the serial killer is an artist is not new. Thomas De Quincey proposed the idea in 1827 in 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts: First Paper' (1897a).¹² In *The Aesthetics of Murder: A Study in Romantic Literature and Contemporary Culture* (1991), Joel Black explores De Quincey's assertion by considering depictions of actual violence and the killer in fiction. Observing the murderer's artistic role, and the recurrence of murder in Romantic literature, he recognizes the aestheticization of violence, and links it to theories of the sublime. Maria Tatar (1995) also examines fictional and factual accounts of murder, but confines her research to sexual murder in Weimar Germany. Compellingly, Tatar looks at a particular society's fascination with suffering, especially the violated female body, and notes the intersection of art and murder in the paintings of Otto Dix and George Grosz, as well as its place in literature and film.

The association of serial killers and artists is not a mere academic fancy though,

¹² Although first published as 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts', after the subsequent publication of the 'Second Paper' and 'Postscript in 1854', the title was used for the composite series. I have identified the individual entries in the series by the addition of their respective subtitles.

for not only has it entered the popular culture of the films I discuss in Chapter 4, but also the mindset of actual murder investigators. Former FBI profiler of serial killers, John Douglas, has stated this of his previous employment:

I always tell my agents, 'If you want to understand the artist, you have to look at the painting.' We've looked at many 'paintings' over the years and talked extensively to the most 'accomplished' 'artists'. (Douglas and Olshaker 1997, 32)

Such discourses permeate the artistic serial killer subgenre and its spectacle of suffering.

Amongst the general studies of performance art (see Goldberg 1988; Jones and Stephenson 1999), specific debates have also focused on the performance of pain. Kathy O'Dell's *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970s* (1998) chronicles many of the performance artists and their works from the 1970s in a search to discover the meanings behind such public displays as having yourself shot, and sewing your mouth shut. The book provides a basic historical framework of a specific type of body art involving control of the body via suffering, whilst it simultaneously reveals an art movement that blended masochism and performance to produce works of art. The cultural impact of this combination of pain and pleasure can be found in the films discussed in my thesis.

Ted Polhemus and Housk Randall (1994; 1996) have mapped the intricate network of body rituals and their meanings. Of particular benefit to my work is Polhemus's solo essay 'The Performance of Pain' (1998), for its useful set of reasons for undertaking manipulations of the body involving physical pain: consciousness-raising/spiritual enrichment, financial profit, body decoration and erotic stimulation. By considering context, especially the existence and nature of an audience, Polhemus restores the gaps between various forms of painful body pursuits. Although only ever points on a set of continuums, these divisions have collapsed under the weight of

interest in the physicality of the human body. But the necessity of his theorizing obligates an exploration, not of the distinctions, but of the culturally coalesced acts and imagery, namely the controlled body, for what were once discrete acts are increasingly fused in contemporary culture in a pursuit of pleasurable pain.

By engaging with the work already formulated in respect of art and the performance of suffering, I bring to my thesis an appreciation of current debates about the aesthetic and cognitive attributes associated with representing the controlled body. The material reveals the debt of tradition, but also pinpoints a change within Western society that has reintroduced the body as a site of performed suffering. But what I in turn bring to these studies is a conceptualization of how contemporary cinema is situated within these circulating discourses of visual culture. Art's (re)new(ed) emphasis on the injured, tormented and subjugated body for spectatorial gratification (whether rhapsodic or willed disgust) has been noted, and has manifested itself as mainstream cinema's controlled body, the representation of which, both acknowledges, and reinterprets, its heritage.

Playing Games

The final area of research to touch on the controlled body is the notion of play. Johan Huizinga in *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* is resolute that 'genuine, pure play is one of the main bases of civilization' (1970, 23). Although making some excessive claims in his tracking of play through many of what he perceives to be the pillars of civilization (law, war, poetry, philosophy, art, etc.), and offering a strikingly elitist and prejudicial opinion privileging an imagined chivalric past, he provides a relevant and persuasive paradigm of play. Thus, he defines it as a space outside ordinary life, with its own boundaries and rules. Roger Caillois in *Man, Play, and Games* (1961) forms a similar conclusion, seeing the governed space

allowing uncertainty to be freely undertaken and experienced.

I will elaborate on their formulations in Chapter 5, but for now I shall merely point out that their construction of play establishes a controlled environment in which risk, pain and abandonment of control can be temporarily and securely enjoyed. Having such a perception affords deliberations on both extreme sports and video games to take on a particular pertinence in relation to the controlled body. In respect of the former, David Le Breton examines why ‘amateur sportsmen in the West have today started undertaking long and intensive ordeals where their capacity to resist increasing personal suffering is all-important’ (2000, 1). His discussion of how these sports allow the experiencing of emotions excluded in other parts of life, including pain and feeling in control, align the sport directly with the painful pleasures of BDSM and body modification. In conjunction with more general studies of the body and sport (see Hargreaves 1986; Messner and Sabo 1990; Featherstone, Hepworth and Turner 1991; Whannel 1999), it is possible to determine a shift in sporting pleasures that some mainstream films have absorbed.

In terms of video games, the notion of control is equally important, with participants stating it as a primary pleasure when playing them (Gailey 1993; Taylor 2002). Furthermore, the games themselves are rule-governed, giving only the illusion of control (Poole 2000; Jenkins and Squire 2002), thus enabling a pleasurable experience of anxiety and suffering (Skirrow 1986; Green, Reid and Bigum 1998; Poole 2000), the very combination expressed in the film *The Game*. Indeed, the twin pastimes of extreme sports and video games provide highly suitable material through which cinema can express the painful pleasures of the controlled body.

A Unified Approach

What should be apparent from the work surveyed above is that even though the

suffering, dominated and controlled body has been discussed or alluded to in many academic fields, it has been approached disparately, so has not been treated as part of a unified concept. I have already acknowledged the differences between consensual BDSM acts and cinematic representations of torture, and recognize the distinctions between didactic religious iconography and the entertainment of film narratives, but this in no way discounts the pertinence of the study. Imaginative energy may initially be required to locate the similarities between a murder scene and an extreme sport, but once achieved, they can be enlightening. Indeed, by overlapping BDSM, body modification, the art and performance of suffering, and playing games, they combine for mutual clarity via the concept of the controlled body. What my perspective stresses is the relevance of investigating the culturally significant theme of depicting (and enjoying) suffering, and the need to situate mainstream cinema's fascination with the spectacle of the controlled body within the existing pleasures and discourses.

2. Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, and Sadomasochism (BDSM) at the Movies

Torture, murder.
Sounds great.
It ain't exactly sex.
Says who?

Max Renn (James Wood) speaking with Nicki Brand (Deborah Harry) in *Videodrome*
(David Cronenberg, Canada, 1982)

In the wake of Laura Mulvey outlining a sadistic male gaze in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), and the subsequent reconsideration of spectatorial pleasure as a possible site for masochistic pleasure for the male observer (Willemen 1981; Neale 1983; Hutchings 1993b; P. Smith 1993),¹ it is surprising that not more analysis has focused on cinematic depictions of violence that throb with the resonance of BDSM. Some purport to address it but misappropriate 'sadomasochism' when violence is their sole concern (Gitlin 1991). Others approach BDSM by analysing the masochist's position but isolate the reading in psychoanalytic vocabulary (Silverman 1980; Studlar 1984); the culturally encoded meanings of BDSM are therefore neglected. My research is intended to take account of these socially inscribed motivations and pleasures, for only by achieving a clearer understanding of what BDSM means to its participants can we determine whether the cinematic depictions correlate with or deny the essence of their controlled interactions. As such, I will examine how BDSM has become more prevalent in cinema, how it has been received and conceptualized, and how the subculturally common submissive male is displaced in the depictions.

The controlled body has been integral to both the narrative and spectacle of many films throughout cinematic history, yet these two formal components of the film are not always in unison: where the narrative stresses sadism, the spectacle

¹ Mulvey's theoretical framework already assumes such masochism for female spectators if they resist taking on the masculine position of spectatorship.

frequently suggests masochism, or a blurring of the two. A product of the divergence is, I will suggest, a parallel reading of these moments that has strong correlations to BDSM interactions. My aim is not to reclassify these scenes, but to point to the potential of other readings and their differing pleasures. But these readings are not merely arbitrary, for they already exist within the BDSM subculture, and frequently influence the structuring of role-play within the subculture itself.

Traditionally, European cinema has had a much greater penchant than Hollywood for BDSM. However, in the last thirty years or so, greater cultural awareness has made BDSM a more prominent feature in Hollywood cinema. Further, whilst the earlier European films had customarily featured consensual punishment of the female body, the more recent depictions have drawn on male masochism. Yet, Hollywood persists in demonizing BDSM. It continues to code the consensual sexual activity as destructive, sadistic domination, whilst it mines it for the illicit pleasures of a sexualized use of power. Before questioning why Hollywood might prefer a sadistic scenario for the controlled body to one that is explicitly marked as masochistic, I wish to point to how BDSM permeates earlier Hollywood films, but is hidden and disavowed.

Hollywood, Subterfuge and BDSM

Many of the films I would categorize as containing BDSM appeared in George De Coulteray's book *Sadism in the Movies* (1965). The question therefore arises as to how a scene in a Hollywood film that is characterized by the narrative as sadistic torture or domination can be interpreted as BDSM, a pursuit defined by consent not oppression. My reasoning is based on three strands of argument: textual, inter-textual and audience appropriation.

In respect of the text, we need to look at a few examples. Francis (John Kerr)

being forcibly tied beneath a swinging axe in *The Pit and the Pendulum* (Roger Corman, USA, 1961) magnificently illustrates the sadistic inclination of Nicholas (Vincent Price). Francis shows no pleasure before, during or after the event. But the scene is so overwhelmingly spectacular, fusing psychedelic splashes of colour with the incessant swinging of the blade, that the image intoxicates the spectator via its aestheticized suffering of the body. The fascination in the spectacle far exceeds narrative motivation, allowing a potential for BDSM properties.

The very excess of the staged dominance can therefore prompt a text to resonate with BDSM. The elaborate methods of planned death employed in *The Mask of Fu Manchu* (Charles Brabin and Charles Vidor, USA, 1932) include being placed between two slowly advancing blocks of spikes, and strapped to a plank gradually descending into a pit of crocodiles as sand runs out of a counterbalance. In the former, the propensity for a BDSM reading is enlivened by the straining body oozing sensuality. The staging need not be so ostentatious though, for certain fetishistic elements such as whips, masks and manacles can suffice, as can mere ropes and bondage, for as Weinberg and Kamel note of BDSM, ‘Often, it is the notion of being helpless and subject to the will of another that is sexually titillating’ (1983a, 20). Thus, the majority of films set in antiquity, whether biblical tales, Roman epics or Greek myths, offer much in the way of BDSM iconography through their deployment of enslavement.

In other instances, narrative elements collaborate with the spectacle to reinforce the BDSM reading. In many films, the act of enduring and then overcoming is crucial to how the character defines himself (the character is nearly always male). Films where the hero must suffer before vanquishing induce a masochistic reading to bubble beneath the narrative surface. An example would be Tarzan (Johnny Weissmuller) in *Tarzan and the Leopard Woman* (Kurt Neumann, USA, 1946).

Having been captured, tied to a stake and maimed by the leopard woman's claw (she also wears a fetishistic leopard skin), he escapes, rescues the women awaiting sacrifice, and destroys the temple, killing the leopard woman and her disciples. Of course, the narrative never relents in stressing Tarzan's lack of consent to his bondage, but it is essential for his character to endure, for only having suffered can he fight back. In effect, in addition to proving his bravery by bearing the pain, he experiences a moral pleasure based on upholding an honour of not hitting first. Paul Smith (1993) has noted a similar structure in relation to Clint Eastwood, whereby the male body is eroticized, then the homoeroticism is denied by torture and destruction of the body, before the hero emerges triumphant. In other words, the tone of male masochism is recuperated and actually functions to serve patriarchal codes and gender roles rather than undermine them. However, my reading suggests that the excess of the suffering can overwhelm the attempted closure, especially if the spectator has found gratification in those other moments.

A similar textual example assimilates the endurance with the superiority of one-upmanship humour. Occurring most consistently in James Bond films, the witticisms undercut the seriousness of capture and torture, whilst suggesting Bond enjoys the chance to prove his worth by extricating himself: in essence, a sign of consent. As with Tarzan, the narrative never directly exposes Bond's willingness to be punished, for these instances of wry comment provide the opportunity to prove his imperviousness to pain, and so simultaneously disavow his suffering and masochistic enjoyment of the challenge.²

Likewise, the finding of a method of death that is deemed 'worthy of such an illustrious opponent' can be utilized to imply consent between 'victim' and 'torturer'.

² Recently Jeffrey A. Brown (2002) has made a similar case for Mel Gibson. Gibson's persona as a male ideal requires him to be both a tough guy and a sex symbol, and Brown sees Gibson's wisecracks under torture as ensuring their compatibility, for the tortured body is objectified yet masterful.

Besides Bond films, the strategy occurs in *Sherlock Holmes and the Spider Woman* (Roy William Neill, USA, 1944). Worried that his death ‘should be reduced to anything as conventional as a bullet’, Holmes (Basil Rathbone) is assured it will be ‘nothing so trite’: he is tied to a model of Hitler at a shooting gallery, and his heart (the symbol of love) is positioned where the metal target had been. The consensual charge of the scene is confirmed by the irony that it is Dr Watson (Nigel Bruce) who is, unknowingly, shooting at his long-term companion.³

Interpretations such as those illustrated above, which suggest characters exhibit masochistic features, are unashamedly disregarded in studies. In his quest to find sadism in the movies, De Coulteray states: ‘If it happens that the heroes have themselves flogged, or tied up, this is never from a taste for passivity, but for erotic purposes exactly as when they take the active part’ (1965, 149). His eagerness to deny any passivity is a major clue to our understanding the threat of BDSM, but the significance must remain unexplored until we have finished our tour of BDSM in films that do not explicitly depict it.

BDSM is perhaps most flagrant in the text when the scene already contains a sexual element. In *The Mask of Fu Manchu*, Fah-Lo-See (Myrna Loy) rapturously cries ‘faster, faster’ as we watch the gleaming black slaves whip her bare-chested prisoner. Afterwards, she has her detainee placed on a sumptuous ottoman where she kisses what she calls his ‘not entirely unhandsome’ body. Of course, the narrative emphasizes her sadism not his masochism, but the scene is open to interpretation.

Potential BDSM scenes are not limited to torture either. The numerous films of John Wayne where a female is put over a knee and spanked (e.g. *Donovan's Reef* (John Ford, USA, 1963) (figure 2.1), *McLintock!* (Andrew V. McLaglen, USA,

³ Unlike some of the original stories that commented on Watson's married status, the films do not put an emphasis on it, so the sense of Holmes and Watson as partners is even more pronounced.

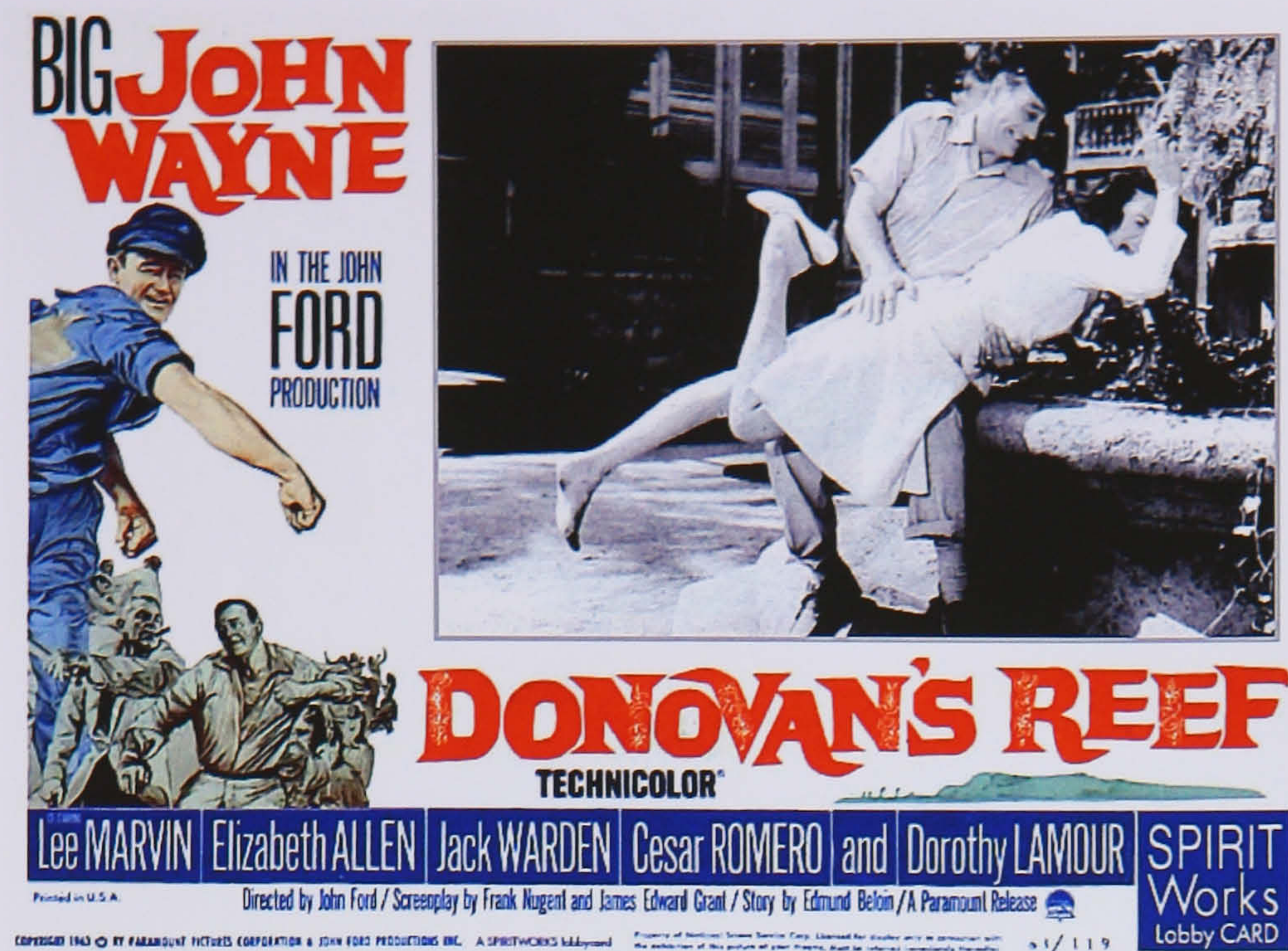


Figure 2.1 Advertising the spanking delights of *Donovan's Reef*

1963) and *True Grit* (Henry Hathaway, USA, 1969)) are prime examples of BDSM. This aspect of his films has not gone unnoticed, with clips being shown in the Spankarama cinema in London (Campbell 1996, 36) and featuring in compilation videos (Moviespank n.d.) along with Elvis Presley in *Blue Hawaii* (Norman Taurog, USA, 1961) and Harold Lloyd chastising a flapper girl as he writes 'The Secret of Making Love' in *Girl Shy* (Fred Newmeyer and Sam Taylor, USA, 1924) (figure 2.2). Because of the emotional involvement in these scenes, the sense of love and violence is intermingled into a BDSM fusion. What differentiates these films from those previously mentioned is that it is the female body that suffers by being spanked: no doubt a result of the love context.⁴

What all these textual elements provide is a BDSM scenario, of which, many are defined by a different temporal or spatial location to that of the film's exhibition (the old west, the torture chamber of the Middle Ages, the jungle, a fantasy book, etc.). Ostensibly, this may keep the threat of BDSM at arm's length, but it also plays into its hands, for certain images lend themselves to BDSM, as it is 'a theatre of

⁴ Exceptions to this tend to be schoolboy based, and involve the use of an implement such as a cane, as for example in Lindsay Anderson's *If...* (UK, 1968), and these are bracketed from a context of love.



Figure 2.2 Chastising the flapper girl in *Girl Shy*

conversion' (McClintock 1993, 208). BDSM acts as a magpie: pilfering sparkling images of domination and submission from Hollywood and beyond. For example, the black leather executioner's mask has become equally recognizable as a sign of BDSM or as a uniform of office. In turn, the paraphernalia, settings and concepts reappear in films and repeat the cycle. It does not form a postmodernist pastiche rather it codes concepts of control via images that are part of a particular visual language of aestheticized suffering. A Freddie Krueger costume is unlikely to become part of the BDSM club culture, yet someone dressed as Pinhead from *Hellraiser* (Clive Barker, UK, 1987), a film that explores notions of pain, and features a body suspended via hooks embedded in the flesh, can (see the television programme *American Vampires* 2001). Thus, specific cinematic imagery and actions tap into a rich vein of visualized control with varying degrees of implied consent; they are (BDSM) scenes within scenes.

In respect of my second line of argument for interpreting explicit sadism within a BDSM framework, inter-textual knowledge explains audience expectations. Some of the most blatant scenes of BDSM can be found in the serials of the 1910s to the

1950s, and their close cousins, the feature film series starring Tarzan, Sherlock Holmes, Fu Manchu, James Bond and Indiana Jones. Best remembered in the early years for *The Perils of Pauline* (Louis J. Gasnier and Donald MacKenzie, USA, 1914), the serials developed into what would be known as ‘cliffhangers’.⁵ In these serials, an excruciating death usually awaited the central protagonist at the end of each weekly episode, but at the beginning of each new episode, the character somehow managed to escape.⁶

Frequently, but by no means uniquely, it was a male protagonist awaiting his fate. At times it may have been merely jumping out of a runaway vehicle before it plunged over a cliff, but at other times the scenes were far more convoluted: Flash Gordon (Buster Crabbe) spread-eagled in the static room in *Flash Gordon* (Frederick Stephani and Ray Taylor, USA, 1936) (figure 2.3), Nyoka (Kay Aldridge) in *Perils of Nyoka* (William Witney, USA, 1942), trapped under a descending spiked ceiling (figure 2.4), and Rex Bennett (Rod Cameron) braced for the impending buzz saw in *Secret Service in Darkest Africa* (Spencer Gordon Bennet, USA, 1943) (figure 2.5). These moments of domination and utter subjection are only established to allow the protagonist to escape. The audiences of the period were aware of these conventions and so could enjoy the spectacle of the suffering body knowing it would only be temporary, albeit with possibly a one week wait before seeing how the escape would take place.⁷ These scenes were as much escapology as torture.

With the demise of the serials in the 1950s, the format of suffering and escape

⁵ *The Perils of Pauline* series actually had self-contained stories.

⁶ Sometimes these moments were more integrated into the body of the story, but they had a similar purpose.

⁷ A character in a more recent film, *Misery* (Rob Reiner, USA, 1990), mentions the structure of the cliffhanger. Annie (Kathy Bates) criticizes the contrivance of the cliffhanger (or chapter play as she calls it), stressing the feeling of being cheated each week as the character escaped the apparently inescapable via the showing of different footage to the preceding week’s climax. *Misery* seems to reverse the notion of how easy it is to escape, having Paul Shelton (James Caan) in bondage and being tortured by the possessive Annie for virtually the whole film.



Figure 2.3 Flash Gordon spread-eagled in the static room in *Flash Gordon*



Figure 2.4 Lobby card showing Nyoka trapped in *Perils of Nyoka*

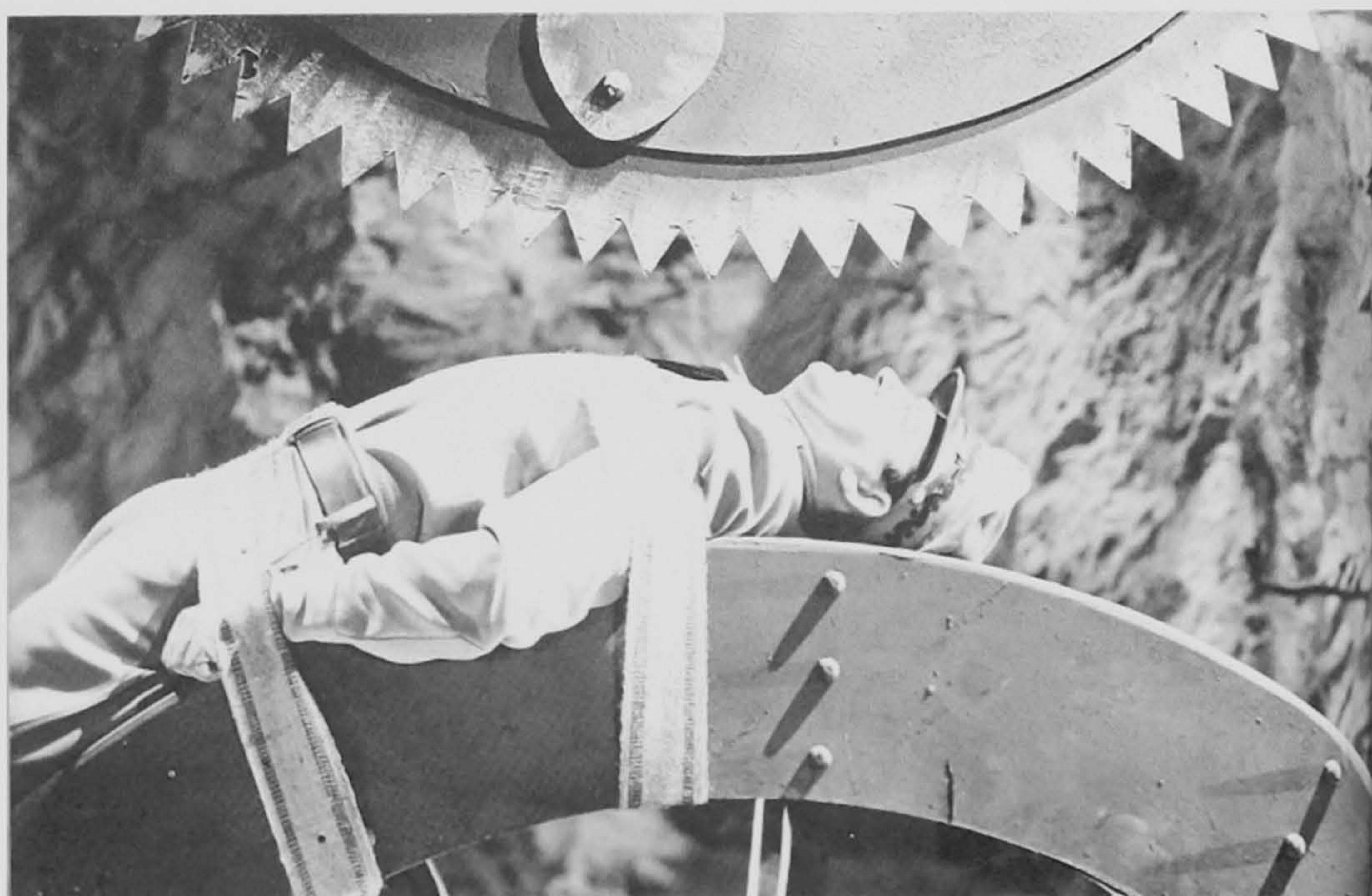


Figure 2.5 Rex Bennett under the buzz saw in *Secret Service in Darkest Africa*

moved on: 'If any cinematic genre inherited the mantle of the Saturday matinee serials and Pearl White tied to the rails, it was James Bond' (Andrew Rissik in Chapman 1999, 20-21). A quintessential example is found in *Goldfinger* (Guy Hamilton, UK, 1964). Bond (Sean Connery) is tied spread-eagled on a solid gold table, and an industrial laser slowly tracks up between his legs towards his groin. The scene updates the version in the novel, which had the serial film's stalwart menace of a buzz saw terrorizing Bond's crotch.⁸

As the laser threatens, Bond blurts out: 'Do you expect me to talk?' Goldfinger (Gert Frobe) replies, 'No, Mr Bond, I expect you to die.' Discounting our knowledge garnered from countless viewings of the scene, we do not expect Bond to die; we expect Bond to escape and Goldfinger to die. Thus, Bond talks his way out of the bondage before eventually dispatching Goldfinger, and this is the narrative pleasure. But the narrative is not in concordance with the pleasure of the excessive spectacle of suffering. Described by G. B. Zorzoli as 'entirely gratuitous exhibition' (in Chapman 1999, 105), the scene stresses domination and submission through a narrative of punishment, but within an erotic context of the sexualized target of pain. That we know Bond will escape justifies our relishing his moment of utter subjection, but momentarily the film is denarrativized; the inevitable escape is forgotten and the spectacle is experienced in itself. The BDSM quotient of the scene relates directly to how successfully the narrative of Bond's assured extrication is withheld at that juncture. In effect, the contractual agreement between the audience and the narrative must be forgotten.

I purposely use the term contractual, for the contract is significant in respect of masochism. Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's tales of masochism were partly founded

⁸ Richard Maibaum, co-writer of the screenplay, explained that the circular saw episode was 'old-fashioned, hackneyed and ridiculous' (in Chapman 1999, 105).

on his own relationships with women, in which a signed contract gave the women rights over his body. These pacts provide a tangible example of the consent present in BDSM, but also point to how the subculture negotiates its dangers. BDSMers establish boundaries, and these contracts are based on trust which Robert Stoller describes as operating so that ‘within the illusion of danger is the already arranged promise that absolute limits will not be exceeded’ (1991, 19). Thus, ‘The art of sadomasochism ... is its theater’, where the aim is ‘to play within the rules of the game while seeming - with exquisite nuance - to be exceeding the limits’ (1991, 19). The contract must remain unspoken during the acts of BDSM, otherwise the pleasures of being totally controlled and totally controlling are lost. The same is true for the films. During the depiction of the controlled body, the inexorableness of getting free must be overlooked. However, the contractual knowledge of Bond’s escape is deemed necessary for the spectator to securely enjoy the masochistic and/or sadistic pleasure in seeing his prone body being tormented. Just as a masochist consents to the punishment s/he enjoys, we too have consented to watch the punishment and derive pleasure from it knowing Bond will not be killed. Our contract with the controlled body is therefore equivalent to that between BDSM participants.

But the narrative insistence on sadism functions as an additional safety net; it incessantly strives to override the contract between the controlled body and the audience by obscuring the tone of masochism developed through the expectation that Bond will suffer before overcoming. In effect, Bond’s destined escape is regarded as only partially authorizing the satisfaction we derive from his controlled body; but by being told he is subjected to sadistic torture, we can legitimately enjoy his masochistic endeavours.

Thus, the narrative emphasis on sadism cloaks both the character’s masochistic

impulse and our own spectatorial enjoyment of BDSM. What this suggests is the occlusion of a threat posed by recognizing the pleasures of BDSM, and masochism in particular. The treatment of BDSM in the movies therefore has a social dimension, that of cultural disavowal of the masochistic pleasures.

The third constituent for my contention that scenes of coercion and torture are potential sites of BDSM, in spite of their lack of explicit consent, is how they resurface in the BDSM subculture itself. In addition to the ‘spanking’ compilation films mentioned earlier, Robert Stoller has noted that ‘There are pornographic films for sadomasochists made up entirely of pieces spliced together from legitimate movies’ (1991, 10), whilst a website, under the umbrella of the Society for Human Sexuality (1994), lists ‘Mainstream films featuring BDSM practices’. Naturally enough, the inventory includes *Belle de jour* (Luis Buñuel, France/Italy, 1967), *9½ Weeks* (Adrian Lyne, USA, 1986), and *¡Atame!/Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (Pedro Almodóvar, Spain, 1989). However, a few titles may surprise, notably *Naked Lunch* (David Cronenberg, Canada/UK, 1991), selected for its aliens tied in suspension, and Disney’s animation feature *Aladdin* (Ron Clements and John Musker, USA, 1992), which was chosen because of Princess Jasmin serving in chains.⁹ Exhibiting signs of an eclectic list chosen by fans rather than a comprehensive survey, the fascinating issue is the breadth of films BDSM can be found in, and not by an imposed academic reading, but via readings audiences actively achieve.

Bob Flanagan, the subject of one of the films I will discuss in detail in this chapter, mentions other equally unlikely sources of inspiration for BDSM. In his poem ‘Why:’ he explains the various influences on his ‘supermasochistic’ lifestyle; included are the expected cultural references of Houdini, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, *The*

⁹ The scene in *Aladdin* is compared with one featuring a chained Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher) in *Return of the Jedi* (Richard Marquand, USA, 1983), which is also recommended.

Pit and the Pendulum, and cowboys and Indians, but also the playroom in *The Addams Family*, and most strikingly, 'Porky Pig in bondage' (Flanagan 1985, 64). The latter transpires to be *Pigs is Pigs* (I. [Friz] Freleng, USA, 1937), featuring a generic pig, which Flanagan describes as 'a very SM cartoon with a lot of bondage and force-feeding' (in Juno and Vale 1993, 59). As can be seen from the advertisement for the film (figure 2.6), it is not a distorted reading that produced a BDSM correlation. Flanagan recognizes his attraction to the image, and is prepared to elucidate it. Recurrently though, any acknowledgement of pleasure derived directly from an image of 'suffering' is repressed, especially if it is laced with sexuality.

In Isabel Pinedo's analysis of the pleasures of horror films, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing* (1997), she considers the videoed murder sequence in *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*. In the scene, the audience is drawn into identifying with the killers through the film revealing that what appears to be a live event is actually a viewing of a recording. The sequence includes the molestation of a woman before and after her neck is snapped, a boy being murdered, and a man who is bound, gagged and blindfolded. Pinedo discussed the film with four feminist women who all found it sexually exciting. One of the women expressed their collectively felt unease at their reactions, stating, 'for some reason while they're basically torturing this woman before killing her, I felt sexually aroused' (anonymous in Pinedo 1997, 103). As Pinedo notes, the response by the four cannot be generalized to everyone, but I sense they are voicing a not uncommon reaction to other films that stress sadism in the narrative, but spectacularize scenes in a way that leaves them decipherable as BDSM. The accent in Pinedo's work seems to be that the women experienced sadistic pleasure (and are surprised by this), but I would suggest Pinedo's reading may be incomplete: there are other pleasures present. In



Figure 2.6 Advertising the BDSM of *Pigs is Pigs*

addition to the sadism that objectifies the attacked woman, there is the masochistic pleasure of identifying with her as ‘object’. Put bluntly, a range of masochistic feelings can exist, from ‘What would I do if I was her?’ to ‘What on earth would that feel like?’ But I believe there is also a third way. Havelock Ellis, although mistakenly reducing the dynamics of control in BDSM to merely pain, hence his use of the term ‘algolagnia’, notes that for a group of people he classifies as having ‘ideal algolagnia’:

the thought or the spectacle of pain acts as a sexual stimulant, without the subject identifying himself clearly either with the inflicter or the sufferer of the pain. Such cases are sometimes classed as sadistic; but this is incorrect, for they might just as truly be called masochistic. (1983, 34)

Without the spectator needing to identify exclusively with either the top or the bottom, the spectacle of BDSM can create a pleasure based around the control. Such a situation goes beyond a combination of the sadism of objectification and the masochistic pleasure of identifying with the object: it is about the spectacle en masse. Consequently, the dynamic of control is the attraction as well as the temporary (and even oscillating) alignment with the dominant and the submissive roles. The appeal then becomes one of witnessing the deployment of control and the loss of control,

not merely the either/or scenario of enjoying sadism or masochism. BDSM is therefore a highly visual means of engaging with the controlled body.

The Truths of BDSM

Prior to examining explicit incidents of BDSM in mainstream cinema, it is essential I correct some of the misapprehensions widely accepted about the subculture, and define its attributes. Tim Edwards in *Erotics & Politics* discusses BDSM, masculinity and pornography. Referencing work by Jessica Benjamin and Andrea Dworkin, he states ‘The sadist is usually unequivocally “masculine” in connotation and the masochist is usually unequivocally “feminine” in connotation’ (1994, 83). Edwards rightly notes this is problematic when the positions of master and slave are not respectively taken up by males and females (either through same-sex BDSM or by heterosexuals reversing the pairing). However, he concludes that ‘one cannot escape the importance of the reification of male dominance in some form’ (1994, 83). The problem with Edwards’s reading is that he accepts the socially imposed model of male/female, active/passive dichotomy, and assumes that the top in a BDSM relationship must be coded as male and the bottom must be coded as female. I am not evacuating the issue of gender, for I do not deny a link between the culturally imposed dichotomy and those at play in BDSM, but suggest Edwards fails to see the nuances.

With the preponderance of bottoms in heterosexual BDSM relationships being male, and the classic dominatrix being defined by her femininity, whether by being described by Sacher-Masoch as a goddess with ‘a graceful and poetic figure’ (1989, 158) or witnessed in popular culture encased in figure-hugging leather and wearing high heels, it is difficult to regard the dominance as male. More universally, the very flexibility of who is top and who is bottom in BDSM relationships reveals the

arbitrary nature of defining active as male and passive as female. The biological determinism promoted by Krafft-Ebing and Freud is challenged at the very moment they saw it operating at its most extreme. The control articulated in BDSM denies the logic of the rules, and this exposure is one of BDSM's most destabilizing attributes. But gender is only part of the equation.

Being the top in a BDSM relationship is not so much about taking on male characteristics but taking on codes that define control. One of these *may* take the form of masculinity, for as G.W. Levi Kamel summarizes anthropologist Paul H. Gebhard's opinion, BDSM 'has its origin in the norms and values of the larger social environment, rather than being an expression of idiosyncratic individual pathology' (1983a, 74). But BDSM can extract its scenarios from all these norms and values, thus control is coded in many forms. For example, a BDSM scenario may include a man being ordered to crawl around on all fours and eat from a dog bowl, or a woman dressed as a pony and being made to pull a cart. The relationship is that of owner/pet, and is not defined by the participants' sex or gender. Comparably, scenes involving a master or mistress and slave are not gendered, nor are those involving a Nazi guard and prisoner, and a mother and baby (in spite of its apparent gender quality). What is being defined is a relationship of control, a visualization and experience of power and powerlessness. To achieve these states, BDSM raids official society's institutions of power and authority for their codes; the prison guard's uniform, the Nazi officer's boots, and the teacher's cane, are all part of the paraphernalia of BDSM. By impertinently commandeering these public symbols of control, and theatrically deploying them as objects of private pleasure, BDSM uncovers the fallacy of there being anything natural about the order of authority in society. In effect they jeopardize what Michel Foucault called 'the automatic functioning of power' (1991, 201). Thus, BDSM reverses the law enforcement of the post-

enlightenment period, which attempted to show that ‘punishment does not appear as the arbitrary effect of a human power’ (Foucault 1991, 105). Instead, there is a return to the pre-enlightenment concept of punishment as spectacle. As Anne McClintock states, BDSM ‘*performs* social power as both contingent and constitutive, as sanctioned neither by fate nor by God, but by social convention and invention, and thus open to historical change’ (1993, 210).

Not only are the hierarchies reversible in BDSM, but also the very structures of power can be revealed. Havelock Ellis may have recognized the role of love in BDSM, arguing that generally ‘The masochist desires to experience pain, but ... inflicted in love’ (1983, 34), and the sadist may even regard the masochist’s pleasure ‘as essential to his own satisfaction’ (1983, 34),¹⁰ but he mistakenly believed the bottom was passive. As I stressed earlier, BDSM is founded on consent, with pre-arranged guidelines of limits, with scenes that can be stopped by using safe words when things go too far. What is even more striking, is that ‘Many S&Mers claim ... that the masochist, rather than the sadist, is really in control during a sadomasochistic episode’ (Weinberg and Kamel, 1983a, 20). What this suggests is that BDSM is an intertwining of power structures. Thus, it validates Michel Foucault’s assertion that power exists as a network (1990; 1991). The individual strands of the network are the sadism and the masochism, whilst the dynamic of the controlled body is the network.

My discussion may seem to have moved a long way from BDSM in the movies, but the true nature of the subculture needs to be revealed to show what is explored and what is hidden in contemporary Hollywood films. What we can summarize about BDSM is as follows:

¹⁰ Although I accept the overriding importance of money in BDSM relationships organized on a commercial basis, Ellis’s premise of caring and understanding appears to remain true, especially when we hear Menchi, a professional dominatrix, state, ‘I try to be a sadist who understands them [masochists]’ (in the television programme *Tokyo Bound* 2000).

- BDSM as a social practice has been depicted inaccurately, with many opinions originating from false assumptions pioneered in psychoanalytic studies.
- BDSM scenes are consensual and collaborative.
- ‘The basic dynamic of S&M is the power dichotomy, not pain’ (Califia 1979, 134).
- BDSM is a heightened, frequently aestheticized, performance of control and loss of control.
- BDSM utilizes socially derived symbols and hierarchies of power, only one of which, but a key one, is gender.

As I embark on my study of films that directly address BDSM, it is these points we need to keep to the fore.

BDSM in Contemporary Cinema

As case studies, I will examine *8mm* and *Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan, Supermasochist*,¹¹ but first I wish to outline the increased incidence of BDSM in films of the past thirty years or so, and the defining qualities of its use in contemporary mainstream cinema. As with the earlier films that attempted to negate BDSM by stressing sadism, the control is visualized via a heightened manner involving setting and/or paraphernalia: objects and locations stand in for pain and control. The key difference is a more explicit referencing of BDSM via sexual situations and notions of consent.

Changes to mainstream cinema censorship alone do not explain the increased visibility of BDSM, for it has occurred throughout society. In her book *Hard Core*, Linda Williams finds that the proliferation of the bondage and discipline subgenre

¹¹ Hereafter, I shall refer to *Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan, Supermasochist* in the abbreviated form *Sick*.

from the 1980s onwards is due to the rise in video pornography that allows the targeting of smaller markets (1999, 301). Simultaneously, the 'unitary categories of identity begin to cross and blur' (1999, 304) as supposed minority interests, such as BDSM, penetrate the mainstream pornography market, bringing it to the attention of more people.

Beyond pornography, the music industry raised interest in BDSM. Working with Nico, The Velvet Underground (a euphemism for the BDSM subculture) released 'Venus in Furs' in 1967, The Stooges sang 'I Wanna Be Your Dog' in 1969, and the New York Dolls had a song called 'Red Patent Leather' (circa 1975). The punk movement of the 1970s brought BDSM further into public view, with The Vibrators releasing 'Whips and Furs' (1976), and X-Ray Spex singing 'Oh Bondage, Up Yours' (1977), and perhaps more significantly in respect of its mainstreaming, influenced fashion, with shops such as Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood's Sex raiding BDSM couture. By the 1990s, the major fashion houses had recognized the importance of the imagery, as had advertising executives, with Peugeot 306 cars, beer and even sofas getting the BDSM touch. Such occurrences augmented the awareness of BDSM, and mitigated its direct address by the cinema. With BDSM made more explicit, there would seem no need to refute its full potential, including unequivocal pleasure in subjection and pain, and the desire to renounce traditional hierarchies by surrendering control to another, and yet the denials remained. Thus, its subcultural challenges to concepts of power, pleasure, pain and control have largely lain undisclosed in mainstream cinema.

The inaugural annual New York S/M Film Festival took place in October 2000, but before the flourishing of BDSM as a mature member of the film festival circuit, a selection of films, reaching from the late 1960s to the end of the millennium, formed a distinguishable path towards this moment. I recognize that films appealing to niche

groups, such as Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* (USA, 1964) and Irving Klaw's bondage films of Betty Page in the 1950s, predate this, as do the 'adults only' films collectively known as the 'Kinkies'.¹² The popularity of these films is not insignificant, but underground cinema and films on the grindhouse cinema circuit are by no means the mainstream. However, their existence forms part of the increased incidence of BDSM in cinema, which eventually infiltrated Hollywood.

In addition to the more marginal cinemas of the USA, other non-Hollywood films increased the perceptibility of BDSM. Fostered by a cultural heritage, especially the literature of de Sade and Sacher-Masoch, European films began incorporating explicit themes of sadism and masochism into their narratives. In particular, directors such as Jean Rollin and Jesús Franco fused soft-core pornography with themes of captivation and punishment.¹³ Exceeding previous limits, these are just two of the better-known directors of low budget films, and many more assisted in giving greater exposure to BDSM. In tandem though, films with an equivalent predilection appeared in the mainstream market place.

The Surrealists, and especially Luis Buñuel, were influenced by de Sade, as is evident in his referencing of *One Hundred and Twenty Days of Sodom* in *L'Âge d'or* (France, 1930). In the period I am investigating, the same book inspired Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò o le centoventi giornate di Sodoma/Salo, or The 120 Days of Sodom* (Italy/France, 1975). Updating the story to the fascist Salo Republic in Italy, scenes of libertines raping, torturing and forcing naked youths to eat shit are circumscribed by themes of complicity of victims and the contemporary concern of the loss of innocence. Other films traded on the author's name as much as his work, including

¹² The Kinkies are deemed to begin with *White Slaves of Chinatown* (Joseph P. Mawra, USA, 1964).

¹³ It is of note that the serial *Perils of Nyoka* is said to be one of Rollin's favourite films (Tohill and Tombs 1995, 173), and Franco directed *The Blood of Fu Manchu* (USA/UK/Spain/West Germany, 1968), the fourth of five Fu Manchu films made in the 1960s, and increased the sexualized suffering quotient far beyond that employed by the previous directors in the series.

De Sade (Cy Endfield, West Germany/USA, 1969) and *Die Jungfrau und die Peitsche/Eugénie ... The Story of Her Journey into Perversion* (Jesús Franco, Spain/West Germany/UK, 1970). Comparably, Sacher-Masoch provided the basis for several versions of *Venus in Furs* including both Massimo Dallamano's updated soft-core porn version *Le malizie di venere* (Italy/West Germany/UK, 1969) and Jesús Franco's liberal reworking of the text as *Paroxismus* (Italy/West Germany/UK, 1969). Other examples of literary adaptations include *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre/Diary of a Chambermaid* (France/Italy, 1964) which was Luis Buñuel's take on Octave Mirbeau's novel, and *Histoire d'O/The Story of O* (France/West Germany, 1975), which was Just Jaeckin's version of Pauline Réage's novel. By no means isolated examples, these films ground their display of BDSM in a literary heritage and the concomitant European sensibility that deems sexualized depictions of the controlled body as admissible as entertainment. Hollywood was bereft of such lineage and relied on other legitimating reasons for BDSM.

The institutional setting was crucial for many films in the USA. Women in prison (WIP) films provided suitable reasons for domination and subjection, plus a liberal dose of sex. Bev Zalcok has outlined a history dating back to the late 1920s (1998, 19-38); however, she observes that by 1971, because of the influence of European directors such as Jesús Franco, a notable shift in depictions had taken place whereby 'the stock characters had become crude stereotypes and the classic scenarios sado-masochistic (often lesbian) "scenes"' (1998, 27). The representations of soft-core male fantasies in films such as *The Big Doll House* (Jack Hill, USA, 1971) and *Terminal Island/Knucklemen* (Stephanie Rothman, USA, 1973) are unremarkable in the period, although Rothman's work has been interpreted as a feminist filmmaker challenging conventions from within (Cook 1976), but what should be noted is the use of a particular situation (and genre) to legitimate a combination of sex and

violence, whilst avoiding the depiction of dominated males (with the implication of masochism).

Companions to these WIP films are those set in religious institutions, which added notions of penance and excess. The subgenre of nunsplotation included *Storia di una monaca di clausura/Diary of a Cloistered Nun* (Domenico Paolella, France/Italy/West Germany, 1973) with its lashing of a naked nun and the degrading punishment of crawling across a stone floor to kiss the Mother Superior's feet; *Interno di un convento/Behind Convent Walls* (Walerian Borowczyk, Italy, 1977) which juxtaposes devotional images of Christ's suffering with explicit masturbation;¹⁴ and *Suor omicidi/Killer Nun* (Giulio Berruti, Italy, 1978) depicting Anita Ekberg sexually humiliating her lesbian lover. Evidence of these same themes can be located in mainstream cinema too. *La Religieuse* (Jacques Rivette, France, 1966) follows the enforced confinement of Suzanne (Anna Karina) in a nunnery where she is subjected to whippings and humiliation by the Mother Superior and the sadistic collusions of other sisters.¹⁵ More excessively, Ken Russell's *The Devils* (UK, 1971) transforms religious punishment into BDSM pleasure, and exorcism into torture via a violently large enema.¹⁶ Both the nunsplotation and WIP films are not as categorical in their expression of BDSM as the literary adaptations, but the theme is much more apparent and incessant than that found in the films prior to the 1960s. They mark a radical shift as BDSM took on a much higher profile in the cinema: these are complete subgenres structured around BDSM rather than isolated films and scenes.

The cycle of Nazi based quasi-porn films of the 1970s is probably the most notorious exploration of BDSM. Along with Pasolini's *Salò*, there was Tinto Brass's

¹⁴ The film also fits into the literature category being based on a Stendhal novel.

¹⁵ The film also fits into the literature category being based on a Denis Diderot novel.

¹⁶ The film also fits into the literature category being based on Aldous Huxley's *The Devils of Loudun* and a John Whiting play.

Salon Kitty (France/Italy/West Germany, 1976) with its scenes of sexual flogging, cross-dressing and a human being treated as a dog, and *Elsa Fräulein SS/Fräulein Devil* (Patrice Rohm, Italy/France, 1977) depicting foot worship and sexualized beatings. Both are examples of storylines revolving around decadent Nazi Germany and SS personnel staffing brothels to spy on officials. Other Nazi films with BDSM elements placed greater emphasis on the Holocaust. These death camp films, such as *Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS* (Don Edmonds, USA, 1974) and its subsequent sequels, and Sergio Garrone's *Lager SS adis kastrat kommandantur/SS Experiment Camp* (Italy, 1976) were closer to the WIP films, often featuring contrived breakout endings. But like the Nazi brothel films, relied on humiliation, fetishistic uniforms and contrived Nazi philosophies, plus elements of SS torture.¹⁷ However, the film largely inspirational for the burgeoning of the subgenre was a mainstream film: Liliana Cavani's 1973 film *Il portiere di notte/The Night Porter*.

As a spectacle, *The Night Porter* matches many of the cycle of Nazis films in its depiction of BDSM, but as Kaja Silverman has argued in her thoughtful article 'Masochism and Subjectivity', the film breaks with tradition and dramatizes 'the lure both for the male and female subjects of negation, passivity and loss' (1980, 8). Detailing the controlling relationship between an SS officer Max (Dirk Bogart) and his favourite concentration camp inmate Lucia (Charlotte Rampling), the film explores his victimization of her within the camp (including voyeuristically photographing her subjection and firing a gun at her), and their recommencement of their relationship after the war.

In one prison scene, a topless Lucia, dressed in Nazi cap, military trousers and long black leather gloves performs a cabaret routine in front of the penetrating gaze

¹⁷ The cycle can be traced back to *Love Camp 7* (Lee Frost, USA, 1968), which in a less graphic format had displayed many of the subgenre's characteristics, and the success of which in Canada had provided the funding for *Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS*.

of Nazi officers. The performance ends with Max, in a direct reference to Salome, presenting Lucia with the head of a prisoner who had tormented her. Silverman has described how Lucia's performance marks her shift from involuntary to voluntary exhibitionism: rather than pursued by Max's camera lens, she performs to the room. The transition is uncomfortable for the spectator, for 'Lucia's dance implies too open an acknowledgement of the masochistic desire of the female subject, and by extension the male subject who identifies with her pain' (1980, 5). By the male subject, Silverman is referring to Max, who, through being disassociated from the gaze he had previously held via his camera, is as excluded as Lucia, and has become fascinated by her pain rather than his own sadism. As Silverman rightly articulates, the recognition of pleasure in pain and being victimized is 'culturally inadmissible' (1980, 6) because it contests the superiority of the active masculine position.

The rekindling of Max and Lucia's relationship after the war perpetuates the threat by reinforcing the potential gratification of the masochistic position, but furthers it too. Pursued by ex-Nazis who have vowed to kill anyone who can link them to their past war crimes, Max becomes a virtual prisoner (replicating Lucia's earlier position). In his liaison with Lucia, the roles of top and bottom become quite fluid, with Max begging to take on the masochist's role by pleading, 'Tell me what to do.' The culturally inadmissible has abruptly become even more taboo, as a man is now requesting to be dominated. What is more, his and Lucia's masochism is not explained away by imprisonment (as in the death camp films), or loyalty to the fatherland (as in the Nazi brothel films), but is seen as a particular relationship that is eventually recognized as a kind of love. Thus, although sharing with exploitation films a common urge to show BDSM, *The Night Porter* also explores its appeal.

Alongside Cavani, other female directors have been prepared to investigate masochism. Lina Wertmüller made *Travolti da un insolito destino nell'azzurro mare*

d'Agosto/Swept Away/Swept Away ... by an Unusual Destiny in the Blue Sea of August (Italy, 1974), a story of role reversals where an upper-class woman becomes a willing slave to her Communist attendant when they become marooned on an island. Contrasting sexual and political oppression, Wertmüller constructs a flexible power dynamic whereby 'the victimizer always appears filled with guilt and unconsciously longs to be punished' (Kaplan 1978, 99-100). Thus, Raffaella (Mariangela Melato), once removed from cultural pressures, adapts and enjoys the dominated position. That it has recently been remade as *Swept Away* (Guy Ritchie, UK/USA/Italy, 2002), with Madonna playing Raffaella's role (renamed Amber), and few major changes to the story, testifies to the greater visibility of BDSM themes in mainstream cinema. Although the sexual violence is less pronounced in the remake, one crucial difference does suggest a greater acceptance of masochistic desires. Both films end with the man wanting proof that his partner will remain submissive back on the mainland. In Wertmüller's version, Raffaella is seemingly corrupted by capitalism, and willingly accepts a return to her dominant status with her husband and rejects her lover. In contrast, in Ritchie's film, Amber is deceived by her husband, who intercepts and returns the engagement ring sent by her lover Giuseppe (Adriano Giannini). A tearful Amber is left believing Giuseppe has spurned her and so is denied the controlled role she desires.

That Ritchie's *Swept Away* was a critical and commercial failure (it was not given a UK cinema release and only grossed \$598,645 worldwide) might suggest mainstream cinema is still not ready for loving BDSM relationships, but another film released in 2002 disproves this. The comparative success of Steven Shainberg's *Secretary*, which won the Special Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival, and took \$4,046,737 at the US box office, validates my view. An elegant, dark comedy, *Secretary* does not treat BDSM as a joke, yet recognizes the humour inherent in

observing how other people get their sexual kicks, and reflects a loving relationship without evangelizing what many still regard as a sinister sexuality.

The film opens with a strident Lee Holloway (Maggie Gyllenhaal) masterfully managing to make coffee, staple papers and fulfil all her secretarial duties whilst submissively bound in a bondage spreader bar that keeps her arms stretched horizontally, and necessitates she steps sideways through doorways (figure 2.7). Confidently and elegantly swaying, Lee is a submissive at work and at play. The film cuts to six months earlier, when Lee is released from a mental institution where she has been receiving treatment for self-harm, a condition apparently brought on by a drunken father and a clinging mother. Re-entering the dysfunctional environment, Lee returns to the comfort of the controlled ritual of self-mutilation. She also gets a job as a secretary to a lawyer, E. Edward Grey (James Spader), who is controlling, obsessive and emotionally remote. He bullies Lee, criticizes her appearance, and remonstrates over the slightest error in her typing. However, on seeing the neat line of Band-Aids on her leg and later witnessing Lee deliberately cutting herself, he recognizes a shared shyness and that he is attracted to her. Ordering her not to cut herself ever again, he begins to instil confidence in Lee. When she makes a typing error the next day, he instructs her to bend over his desk and he vigorously spansks her. That it is pleasure and not harassment is made apparent by her soft moans, and a brief but tender interlacing of their fingers to end the scene. Lee begins to crave Grey's reprimands and corrective training, so much so she deliberately leaves mistakes in her work, but simultaneously is empowered to throw away her collection of cutting implements.

That their relationship does not run smoothly takes the film into the bracket of love story rather than a typically damning exposé of BDSM, yet it still explores the peculiarities of their desires. As Lee attempts to get closer to Mr Grey, he backs off



Figure 2.7 Lee Holloway mastering masochism in *Secretary*

and fires her, unsure of a romance intertwined with power and subservience, and fearful of revealing his vulnerability. But the relationship is finally consummated and brought to fruition after Grey compassionately bathes and tends Lee's scarred body.¹⁸ What distinguishes the film is that we are invited to enjoy a happy ending that retains BDSM as a core component of their relationship (few love stories conclude with the lingering image of a honeymoon centred around outdoor sex where one partner is bound to a tree).

Of course, *Secretary* can be faulted for relying on the supposition that masochism is only excusable as a less self-destructive version of self-harm. In other words, the pleasure is tainted by pathology. The same link between self-mutilation and BDSM is made in *La Pianiste/The Piano Teacher* (Michael Haneke, Austria/France/Germany, 2001), whilst *The General's Daughter* (Simon West, USA/Germany, 1999) psychologizes a woman's need for bondage as a nihilistic re-enactment of her being gang-raped. Yet *Secretary* largely overcomes the negativity the others insist upon. Lee blossoms with confidence whereby, in true BDSM

¹⁸ I will discuss the treatment of scars in more detail in the next chapter in relation to *Crash*.

fashion, the submissive takes control, and the film remains focused on the gentle, caring aspect of the couple's bond. However, like all depictions of the woman as the masochist, the film is open to the criticism that it depicts patriarchal desires, and it has been so charged (Pierce 2003). *Romance* (Catherine Breillat, France, 1999), which the female director has argued shows a woman freeing herself of masochism, whilst experiencing various masochistic pleasures (in Felperin and Williams 1999, 13), has been similarly accused (Vincendeau, 1999, 52). But why would female directors also go along with this? Possibly, it is so engrained in patriarchal society that it cannot be contested, but I do not think so.

What must not be lost is that fantasy is not reality: to think is not to do, and to play is not to be. With the emphasis in both *Romance* and *Secretary* on the female protagonist's viewpoint (they are the only fully developed characters and speak directly to the audience via voiceovers), it would not be surprising to think of the respective roles and themes as corresponding to the women's subjective experiences. In *Secretary*, the office becomes a fantasy space, an idyll of natural textures of wood and flowers that contrast with the plastic outside world. In such an environment of innocence, Lee undertakes her adventure. The fantastical is also suggested by her winning back Mr Grey by remaining at his desk for several days (whilst friends and television reporters visit). Similarly, *Romance* is criticized for Maria (Caroline Ducey) longing to meet Jack the Ripper and for her BDSM partner being a Don Juan figure (Vincendeau 1999, 52). BDSM scenarios rely on such notions already in circulation within the wider culture to give them their charge, so recycling is natural. Weinberg has stated 'It is impossible to attempt to develop an understanding of the sadomasochistic subculture without examining the place of fantasy and theatricality' (1978, 105). Comparably, in defence of lesbian BDSMers, who have been criticized for undermining feminism, Patrick D. Hopkins has argued that 'SM sexual activity

does not replicate patriarchal sexual activity. It simulates it.... Simulation implies that SM selectively replays surface patriarchal behaviours onto a different contextual field' (1994, 123).¹⁹ The aesthetics of suffering and domination are as fundamental as the instruments of restraint and 'coercion' in the construction of the controlled body. We should also note that masochist fantasies are common to both men and women, as shown in surveys by Nancy Friday and Shere Hite (Segal 1993, 13). Further, the 'male fantasy' may not be exclusively tied up in the sadistic control of women and the desire to punish them. As I argued in relation to *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, there is cross-gender identification with the subjected female, as well as the overarching pleasure of a scene founded on control.

I would however agree that there is a disparity between the depictions of male and female masochism in films, and the disjuncture is central to my research. The time is apparently still not right for a masochistic male secretary and female boss. A unifying factor of nearly all these films that explicitly depict BDSM, whether USA exploitation or European art films, and others that fit less easily into these categories such as *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, USA, 1986), *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* and *Po Urodov i Liudei/Of Freaks and Men* (Aleksei Balabanov, Russia, 1998), is a fixation with women in the bottom role of BDSM exchanges. Even films that posit BDSM alongside other variations of heterosexual sexual interactions tend to reserve masochism for the woman. These 'different strokes for different folks' films, such as *9½ Weeks*, and we could also include *Belle de jour* (a good example of the use of fantasy too) and *Romance*, do little to explore the dynamics of BDSM. But all these films, especially the English language films, with their use of familiar film stars and the resulting notoriety, certainly helped bring BDSM more into the mainstream.

¹⁹ Hopkins's use of the term simulation does not exclude real pain however, but he makes clear that the pain may be felt quite differently, reconceptualized as a sensation due to the context (1994, 137, n.4).

A handful of films have broached the topic of male masochism though, most visually via the leather-clad dominatrix. *Maîtresse* (Barbet Schroeder, France, 1976) tells of a professional dominatrix, her 'torture chamber' equipped apartment, and her difficult relationship with her boyfriend. The subject matter was evidently troubling, with the film given an X certificate in the USA, and originally banned in the UK (before being passed with cuts).²⁰ Outside mainland Europe, the relationship between the professional dominatrix and her clients has been scrutinized in documentary films such as *Hookers, Hustlers, Pimps and their Johns* (Beeban Kidron, USA/UK, 1993) and *Fetishes* (Nick Broomfield, USA/UK, 1996). Combining interviews with filmed BDSM scenes, they foreground the control element, role-playing, and mundaneness of the activities, plus the predominance of male clients in commercial BDSM. But although the male masochist is central to these films, they are equally concerned with the dominatrix, a persona that has become over-determined in cinema of the last twenty years.

From the bondage sex of Lulu (Melanie Griffith) in *Something Wild* (Jonathan Demme, USA, 1986) via PVC catsuit costumed Michelle Pfeiffer in *Batman Returns* (Tim Burton, USA, 1992) to *Charlie's Angels* (McG, USA/Germany, 2000), where at one point Alex (Lucy Liu) plays a leather-clad efficiency expert swishing her cane as she dominates the on-looking men, the dominatrix has become a common feature of mainstream cinema. In between these films, BDSM-influenced dominant women have included Kathleen Turner crushing Michael Douglas between her thighs in *The War of the Roses* (Danny DeVito, USA, 1989), a fate Harrison Ford also suffers at the hands (or more accurately, the legs) of Daryl Hannah in *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, USA, 1982); whilst Pamela Anderson, in her revealing leatherwear bodice, is a

²⁰ It was only in May 2003 that the film was finally released uncut on video in the UK (including the removed shots of a woman being spanked and a penis being pinned).

bounty hunter of men in *Barb Wire* (David Hogan, USA, 1996), and Lucy Lui had geared up for her role in *Charlie's Angels* by playing a full-time dominatrix in *Payback* (Brian Helgeland, USA, 1999), where she twists her client's nipples as he is held at gunpoint. Coinciding with the broader cultural interest in powerful, sexualized women, notably Madonna (who played the dominatrix role in *Body of Evidence* (Uli Edel, USA, 1992)) and the *Spice Girls*,²¹ the fetishistically clothed dominant female ubiquitously connotes risqué women. BDSM is virtually reduced to the clothing itself (plus the occasional prop), implying it can be taken on and off as pleased, whilst the spectacle of the dominatrix obliterates the masochism of the willingly dominated male. In effect, male subservience vanishes behind the black leather bodice and the swishing whip. The numerous appearances of the dominatrix in films discloses contemporary cinema's fascination with control and BDSM, but the portrayal reveals a desire to not consider wholly BDSM as a social practice.

Furthermore, BDSM has become shorthand for the underbelly of society. Thus, Griffin Dunne's tour through New York in *After Hours* (Martin Scorsese, USA, 1985) brings him into contact with bondage; in *Blue Velvet*, Kyle MacLachlan's character is confronted with a BDSM relationship amidst the disturbing underworld of an ostensibly respectable small town; and the corrupt world of the *Bad Lieutenant* (Abel Ferrara, USA, 1992) is an amalgam of the excessive and vile, which apparently includes bondage sex. An even greater castigation of BDSM is displayed in *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, USA, 1994). The BDSM scenario of a man fully encased in a leather bodysuit (including head mask) and kept chained in a box in a bondage equipped basement, is made depraved by the man being 'owned' by two racist, sadistic, rapist murderers – undoubtedly pulp fiction characterizations.

²¹ We might also note that the *Spice Girls*' video 'Say You'll Be There' (Vaughan Arnell, USA, 1996) recreated one of cinema's most famous pseudo-dominatrix films: *Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* (Russ Meyer, USA, 1965).

The danger quotient of the dominatrix and BDSM can be heightened further so that they signify a deviance linked to the horrific. Amanda Donohoe, in Ken Russell's tongue-in-cheek *The Lair of the White Worm* (UK, 1988), stands astride a boy scout in her heavily codified black PVC catsuit and leather thigh boots, before paralysing him by biting his penis. Darker still, David Cronenberg has frequently mined the iconography and practices of BDSM to evoke both the twisted and more sexually disturbed aspects of a character's nature. In *Dead Ringers* (Canada, 1988), twin gynaecologists, Elliot and Beverly (both played by Jeremy Irons) share thoughts and lovers, but drift apart as one patient/lover, Claire (Geneviève Bujold), comes between them. Throughout the film, the hospital setting and props, including foot stirrups, probes and highly theatrical red surgical gowns, accentuate the sense of recreated BDSM scenes. Similarly, Beverly's use of tools designed for 'operating on mutant women', but previously exhibited in an art gallery, foregrounds the BDSM attribute of fetishized implements of pain. In one scene, tied up with rubber tubing and medical clamps, Claire takes part in BDSM sex with one of the brothers. The scene doubles an earlier gynaecological examination by one of the twins that had revealed Claire's monstrous difference: a triple uterus. The duality of the two scenes transgresses: dissolving the boundary between the sexualized body and the medicalized body (something repeated in *Romance* via a gynaecological examination). The power of the doctor, embellished by the weight of medical authority, has been metamorphosed into sexual control.

Even more blatant is Cronenberg's *Videodrome*, which features a satellite channel rejoicing in broadcasting a show that has 'no plot.... [There's just] torture, murder [and] mutilation'. After watching the channel with sensation-seeking Nicky Brand, Max Renn puts a needle through her ear as a prelude to sex; later in the film, she burns a pseudo third nipple onto her chest with a cigarette, and enjoys being

whipped, in a dislocated fashion, by being a responsive image on a television screen. Abstracting BDSM into visceral horror, a blurring of hallucinations and reality leaves Max with a gaping vaginal wound in his chest, which both he and another character fist to insert videotapes. *Videodrome* does not expound the pleasures of BDSM, but it emphatically captures a rapacious allure and elicits new sexual sensations.

The horror film has found other uses for BDSM. The *Hellraiser* films²² all use visual tropes associated with BDSM to summon conceptions of pain. Heavily exploiting paraphernalia and iconography now associated with the aesthetics of BDSM, the signs have been converted back into their original function, that of torturous agony, but with the twist of sexual potency.

When not made horrific, BDSM can be undermined by being made humorous. British films, conspicuously *Personal Services* (Terry Jones, UK, 1987) and *Staggered* (Martin Clunes, UK, 1994) reduce BDSM to little more than a ridiculous indignity. Another, *Preaching to the Perverted* (Stuart Urban, UK, 1997), although evidently crusading to insert some truth into the depictions of BDSM, exposing the archaic laws used to clampdown on it and disassociating BDSM from torture by stressing consent, remains an anodyne comedy, safely securing the ludicrously punned dominatrix, Tanya Cheex, in a vanilla heterosexual couple. Britain is not alone in its use of comedy to deal with the apparently difficult subject of BDSM. In the USA, Mel Brooks has probably been the wittiest, with a character in *High Anxiety* (USA, 1977) declaring, 'Too much bondage; not enough discipline.' I must also admit, Brooks has had the insight to perceptively recognize the importance of role-play in BDSM, and has used it to great humorous effect. The scene in *The*

²² The *Hellraiser* films are: *Hellraiser* (1987), *Hellbound: Hellraiser II* (Tony Randel, UK, 1988), *Hellraiser III: Hell on Earth* (Anthony Hickox, USA, 1992), *Hellraiser: Bloodline* (Kevin Yagher, USA, 1996), *Hellraiser: Inferno* (Scott Derrickson, USA, 2000) and *Hellraiser VI: Hellseeker* (Rick Bota, USA, 2002).

Producers (USA, 1968) where the desperate theatrical producer Max Bialystock (Zero Mostel) plays 'chauffeur' to the 'Contessa' of his elderly potential backer, having played the 'tomcat' to her 'pussycat' and the 'stableboy' to her 'milkmaid', is a delight, yet full of the dynamics of control. Richard Dyer is therefore correct to note that 'Comedy is an area of expression that is licensed to explore aspects of life that are difficult, contradictory and distressing' (1985, 92).

And yet, cinematic depictions of blatant BDSM have concentrated on the female masochist, with it rarely being a male body that is controlled. When the male is submissive, narrative ploys or other characters largely obfuscate the masochism. Thus, it is labelled as deviant, horrific or comedic, when not banished behind the overpowering image of the dominatrix. What is to be feared in male masochism that makes it so inexpressible? The answer may lie in the social reality of BDSM, and can be scrutinized via a comparison of *8mm* and a film that actively engages with male masochism, *Sick*.

'You don't exactly get turned off either.'

Joel Schumacher's *8mm* is highly representative of contemporary Hollywood's depiction of BDSM, conforming to many of the categories I outlined earlier such as representing the underbelly of society, and displaying BDSM paraphernalia to suggest risk. I have chosen the film to contrast with *Sick* because of how it casts BDSM in entirely negative terms. Its central theme is far from consensual, for it is snuff films,²³ yet it activates BDSM to raise issues of consent, masochism and the controlled body.

²³ Snuff films are defined as films that depict the actual killing of a human being, and in common parlance, usually refer to films explicitly made to show that killing, especially films that appear to begin as a standard porn film, but then the person having sex (usually a woman) is suddenly killed. The phrase came to common knowledge when Ed Sanders suggested the Charles Manson cult had filmed murders. To date, no snuff film has ever been found. See David Kerekes and David Slater's book *Killing For Culture* (1995) for a full investigation of snuff films.

Nicolas Cage plays surveillance expert Tom Welles who is asked by the widow of a wealthy industrialist to investigate a reel of 8mm film found in her late husband's private safe. The film contains a silent recording of what appears to be a girl about to have sex with a man wearing BDSM leather and chains and a zipped leather mask; instead of coitus, he stabs her to death. Welles enters the underworld of pornography in search of the victim's identity, leaving behind his comfortable family life and discovering a dark side to his character.

The storyline is not dissimilar to Paul Schrader's *Hardcore/The Hardcore Life* (USA, 1979), where a Calvinist father resorts to lies and violence to find his daughter in the porn industry.²⁴ Ostensibly, in both films, the female victim (alive or dead) is the quest, yet it is the male body (and masculinity) that is investigated. A moment in both films that exemplifies this is the concentration on the male protagonists as they watch the footage of the respective victims: only snatches of the film are seen, but the men's reactions are shown in detail, in particular, those of Tom Welles (figure 2.8). Both films stress the apparently inevitable slide from porn to BDSM, child pornography and snuff movies. Indeed, in *8mm*, BDSM becomes virtually interchangeable with snuff, and the treatment of the two is a prime concern.

Throughout *8mm*, assertions are made that define snuff in terms of BDSM. The 8mm film is traced back to 'producer/director/weirdo' Dino Velvet (Peter Stormare), 'the Jim Jarmusch of S&M', who makes 'Bondage, fetish, gothic hardcore'. Yet although sex shop worker Max California (Joaquin Phoenix) stresses Dino Velvet makes 'Nothing illegal, but borderline', it transpires that Dino made the snuff film too.²⁵ It is also implied that BDSM is a bridge into predatory bestiality and

²⁴ *8mm* even reworks a line from *Hardcore* into its tagline 'Some doors should never be opened'. In *Hardcore*, a detective tells the father that there are 'doors that shouldn't be opened'.

²⁵ The name Dino Velvet has now been taken up as a pseudonym by someone advertising in the small ads in *Bizarre* magazine, offering both adult films, and the closest you can get to a snuff movie, mondo films (see No. 57, 2002, 122).



Figure 2.8 Investigating male suffering via the pretext of female suffering in *8mm*

paedophilia.

The montage opening of a Dino Velvet film includes BDSM images of women in fetishwear dominating a man in a collar and lead, and flagellating his bottom. Intercut are close-up images and sounds of howling cats and dogs. The equating of animals and animal behaviour is extended by Dino's studio being located in New York's meat market, the establishing of which, complete with images of lifeless carcasses and flesh draped on hooks, comes immediately after Tom has viewed a film depicting a gagged, spread-eagled woman hanging from a bar.

The affiliation of BDSM with pornography involving the coercion of children exists via association too. As Tom is shown around a dimly lit illegal night market, he is offered the following: 'Extreme bondage. Rape films. Sick shit.' Besides condensing a potentially consensual scene with a vile act of duress, the moment comes immediately after Tom had handled material clearly labelled 'Kids', the touching of which necessitates rubbing his hand clean afterwards. Music in the film also makes an overt link to paedophilia, with the Aphex Twin song 'Come to Daddy' (1997) used by the killer Machine (Chris Bauer) to lure Tom around his house. Wearing his leather mask, Machine collapses child abuse and consensual BDSM into

predatory sexual sadism. Of course, it can be argued that the mask performs a function of disguise. However, it is notable that like *Hardcore* (where the victim in the snuff movie wears a leather hood and is chained in a BDSM scenario), the type of mask emerges from the BDSM subculture; in contrast, in two recent, non-Hollywood films that focus on snuff, *Mute Witness* (Anthony Waller, UK/Germany/Russia, 1995) and *Tesis/Thesis* (Alejandro Amenábar, Spain, 1996), the killer has a balaclava instead. One reviewer has asked: ‘How shocking is a leather mask these days?’ (Fusion3600, n.d.). The answer from Welles, as he stares at them in a sex shop, and from Hollywood, seems resolutely to be ‘extremely shocking’. The leather facial attire of BDSM is evidently shorthand for evil.

Numerous other references also link BDSM to deviancy and snuff. A BDSM nightclub conveniently offers the spectator the titillation of bondagewear but also allows Welles to wander around disapprovingly. Whilst inside, a man in a manacled latex codpiece (figure 2.9) supplies what transpire to be fake snuff movies; he is therefore shown to be untrustworthy, both by his products and by upping the price when Welles tries to buy them. Elsewhere in the film, a bondage ball gag is strategically placed in the snuff film alongside knives, and it is a tattoo, a sign of the world of body modification, a subcultural trend that is frequently interlaced with BDSM, that identifies the killer.²⁶

Furthermore, the progression from BDSM to snuff and other non-consensual actions is made explicit in the film. Before even seeing the snuff film, Tom declares, ‘This is probably an S&M film of some sort. Simulated rape, simulated violence.’ Albeit distinguishing between snuff and BDSM, it is apparent that Welles (and the film) is using simulation differently to Patrick D. Hopkins (1994): it is not the

²⁶ Of course, the intellectual and benevolent Max is also covered with tattoos, but he too is part of what is depicted as an undifferentiated sleazy world of porn, BDSM and snuff, and admits to having been changed by it.



Figure 2.9 Explicitly linking BDSM and snuff in *8mm*

context that has changed but the act. In the film, the reality of pleasure in pain is unfathomable; it must therefore be faked. In addition, Max states to Welles, ‘Look, some of these S&M and bondage films you’ll see, they straddle the line.... It’s all harder than hardcore, but mostly legal.’ In an earlier draft of the script Max goes further: ‘How are you supposed to tell if the person tied up with the ball gag in their mouth is a [*sic*] consenting or not? Step over that line, you’re into kiddie porn. Rape films, but there aren’t many’ (Walker, n.d.).²⁷ BDSM thus becomes defined by harmful exploitation, and to all intents and purposes, interchangeable with snuff. Andrew Kevin Walker’s earlier draft may have physically voiced these sentiments more vehemently, but the filmed script, both in terms of narrative and visuals, still leaves us in no doubt as to what is meant. As Dustin Putman (1999) worryingly concludes, ‘*8mm* is probably the smartest film I have seen that deals with the sick nature of S&M and snuff’. Official culture therefore constructs snuff as the logical conclusion of BDSM.

²⁷ This earlier script goes even further, with Max indicating the naturalness of the progression: ‘It’s only gonna get worse. More and more you’ll see perverse hardcore coming into the mainstream, because that’s evolution. Desensitization.... Soon, *Playboy* is gonna be *Penthouse*, *Penthouse*’ll be *Hustler*, *Hustler*’ll be hardcore, and hardcore films’ll be medical films. People’ll be jerking off to women laying around with open wounds. There’s nowhere else for it to go’ (Walker, n.d.). The logic of the sequence is not new. Most famously, Linda Lovelace claimed that women in porn films were being murdered on camera (Kerekes and Slater, 1995, 261, n. 19).

In addition to formulating a singular concept of violent sexual deviancy based on oppression, with no concept of permission, thus denying BDSM its true status, *8mm* castigates BDSM by establishing it as the antithesis of a loving family relationship. Where, as we shall see, *Sick* seeks to show that love and BDSM are far from irreconcilable, *8mm*, by merging snuff into BDSM, creates a sexually depraved underworld that is defined as 'other'.

Mychael Danna's score provides what Joel Schumacher (1999) has described in the director's commentary to the UK DVD release of *8mm* as the idea of the Kasbah. The theme is first used when an 8mm film is projected in a darkened room at the beginning of the film, but as the scene fades into Welles arriving at a brightly lit Miami airport, the music changes into more traditional brooding sounds. The two key components of the movie, Welles and the snuff film, are instantaneously opposed. Throughout the remainder of the film, including the underground porn bazaar scene, the Morocco-influenced music serves to suggest the deviant 'other'.

The establishing of a distant world conforms to the depiction of snuff in the movies. *Snuff* (Michael Findlay and Roberta Findlay, USA/Argentina, 1976) was sold as 'The film that could only be made in South America' (in Kerekes and Slater 1995, 11).²⁸ Similarly, *Mute Witness* is set in Russia; in *Tesis*, the violent film the lecturer looks for is said to be Czech and is located in the pornography section of the library; and the fake snuff films in *8mm* are believed to be from the Philippines.²⁹ Even in *Hardcore*, the snuff film was made in Mexico, a point emphasized by the silent film being diegetically accompanied by Mexican music.

In *8mm*, the distant land of deviance is contrasted with the home life of Tom Welles, a man who recently became a father to a daughter he calls Cinderella. In his

²⁸ Originally filmed as *Slaughter* in 1971. *Snuff* featured additional footage tacked on to the end that implied a woman was killed on camera.

²⁹ We should also note that the satellite channel in *Videodrome* is first said to be from Malaysia.

fairytale life, he is a new man who tends to the crying baby, offers to cook dinner, and who has sex in the dark in the missionary position. Innocence personified, his one deceit being his smoking of cigarettes. His house too, set in the countryside of Harrisburg, is physically distanced from the decadence and depravity of the cities of Los Angeles and New York that his investigations take him to.

The world of porn, snuff and BDSM is temporally separate too. The snuff film is a silent 8mm film. Not only is it an old format (reinforced by its accentuated noise of projection), but also the specific film stock is discontinued. If the film technology is primitive, so is the imagery. The snuff film conforms to what Kerekes and Slater have outlined as the prescribed cinematic representation of snuff, established in such films as *Emanuella Nera in America/Emmanuelle in America* (Joe D'Amato, Italy, 1976), *Last House on Dead End Street* (Roger Watkins, USA, 1977) and *Hardcore*. Thus, snuff film 'was one room and one camera; was black and white; was silent; was grainy; was colour with bad editing; was expensive. Was a commodity' (1995, 43). The snuff film in 8mm, dovetails neatly into this remit for primitive cinema. But it is somewhat strange that it does. It is incongruous that 'the Jim Jarmusch of S&M', who some call 'an artist', would produce something so lacking in production values. The narrative motivation for using an 8mm film is to establish a more backward world (a contrast to *Tesis* where the snuff films are shot on video, and the *new* technology of digital zoom allows the tracing of the camera). In a scene that precedes Dino attempting to film Welles with a movie camera, Max tries to record Welles with a camera heavily coded as video via the point-of-view shot through the viewfinder. The world of snuff/BDSM evidently relates to a distant time.

The weaponry follows a similar pattern, thus the Neanderthal sadist Machine has his knives (and is mistakenly defined by them as Machete, at one point), Dino has his slightly advanced crossbow, whilst only those that straddle the moral line, including

Tom, opportunist porn merchant Eddie Poole (James Gandolfini) and snuff-procuring lawyer Longdale (Anthony Heald) have guns.

Similarly, when 'Come to Daddy' is played in Machine's house, it is the properties of a record player (the stylus sticks then is moved), that lure Welles to the killer, not a skipping CD track. The antiquated world even reaches as far as the laborious card index system that Tom has to search through to identify the dead girl as Mary Anne (Jenny Powell). In contrast, Welles is from a different world. He can capture images from film into a computer, use a mobile printer to produce photographs, and utilize expensive image enhancement technology. Max may warn that the Internet will usurp the dirty but visible porn bazaar, but for the time being, technology is clean and advanced. I would therefore suggest the emphasis on the technologically primitive is used to imply a similarly primitive set of emotions in the BDSM subculture. Technical superiority goes hand-in-hand with moral superiority so that the world of BDSM is categorized by its lack of evolution. *8mm*, like most contemporary Hollywood films, labels BDSM in a manner akin to Krafft-Ebing declaring masochism and sadism to be 'among the primitive anomalies of the sexual life' (1998, 54).

That Tom Welles can be linked to, and even crossover into the primitive world, is key to the film: in the crass words of Max, 'you dance with the devil, the devil don't change; devil changes you'. As Tom trawls through countless images and videos in search of clues as to the makers of the snuff film, Max cautions, 'Let me tell you, there's things that you're gonna see that, that you can't unsee. They get in your head and they stay there.' Having never seen a snuff film, Max is evidently referring to the film's conglomeration of anything it defines as deviant, including BDSM. Thus, it is BDSM as much as snuff that prompts Tom's eventual moral fall. Furthermore, as Max indicates about his acquired obsessive viewing habits, Tom

does not 'exactly get turned off either'. Tom's fixation has become more than mere dogged professionalism. He puts off going home, forgets to telephone his wife, continues watching the snuff film when she calls him, and even abruptly hangs-up on her when he discovers something interesting (a blatant depiction of where his true interest now lies). He may not be aroused but it has certainly raised his attention. Tom's disregard for endangering himself (and later his family and Max) is a masochistic desire to know, not just that Mary Anne did die, but what it would have been like.

Pat Gill, in 'Taking it Personally: Male Suffering in *8mm*', recognizes the same masochistic trait. Thus, when Tom turns vigilante Gill comments, 'it is not only rage but a need to suffer that prompts Welles to murder' (2003, 163). Gill interprets Welles's behaviour via Freud's concept of moral masochism whereby 'morality becomes sexualized afresh' and 'the masochist must do something inexpedient, act against his own interest ... and possibly destroy his own existence in the world of reality' (Freud in Gill 2003, 168). Welles's moral masochism is located by Gill in his feelings of guilt: he identifies with the passive female victim and disavows his status as a man because it links him to the perpetrators of the murder. Interpreting the close bond formed between Welles and Mary Anne's mother, Janet (Amy Morton), a tie that culminates in his telephoning her to detail her daughter's death, Gill concludes 'Women must feel pain in order for him to feel alive' (2003, 182).

Although I am unconvinced of the specifically gendered projection of pain, I concur that Welles's relationship to it is vital. The man who had declared that the future was 'surveillance' can no longer just look; the need to know and experience is too great. Tom is compelled to attempt to bridge the gap between the image of Mary Anne's suffering and her actual experience. He wants to be in the same scenario of control and utter subjection: both a reversal and embracing of the suffering. But

Tom's compulsive desire to know is not the haunting uncertainty explored in *Spoorloos/The Vanishing* (George Sluizer, Netherlands/France, 1988), it is the fascination and allure depicted in *Cruising* (William Friedkin, USA, 1980) that hints at the corruption of BDSM sex.

The issue of whether or not the combination of sex and violence is real becomes key. We observe this when the Philippine tapes are proved to be fabricated because the same girl dies twice, and Max rejoices: 'That's great. Wow. *Snuff 2: The Resurrection*.' If the snuff movie is a fake, it is okay. Although couched in terms of snuff, the references throughout the film would indicate that BDSM is also included in such a view. Therefore, simulated BDSM would be okay, but actual BDSM would not. The notion of consent, vital to BDSM (and *Sick*), has no bearing on *8mm*: consent to pain is incomprehensible. Thus, although Tom must be seen to have a masochistic desire to know, his willing participation in his own pain must be circumvented, whilst bringing the issue of consent to the fore. *8mm* employs a novel means to achieve this.

Posing as a potential commissioner of a BDSM film, Tom meets Dino and Machine at a film set. However, he walks into a trap. Shackled to a dirty bed in the disused red warehouse amidst dangling chains and spread-eagled shapes, the theatrical BDSM stage is set. At first appearing to be in a position akin to Mary Anne's in the snuff film, it is actually the severely beaten Max, hung on a crucifix, who Dino says will be killed, fucked and filmed. After the burning of the 8mm snuff film, Tom indeed witnesses the bloody slitting of Max's throat, set against the affected (and St. Sebastian influenced) backdrop of the target and crossbow bolts (figure 2.10). However, Tom manages to escape during a contrived shoot-out, thus, under the cover of vengeance, he masochistically endangers himself and his beloved family as he pursues the remaining members of the snuff ring.

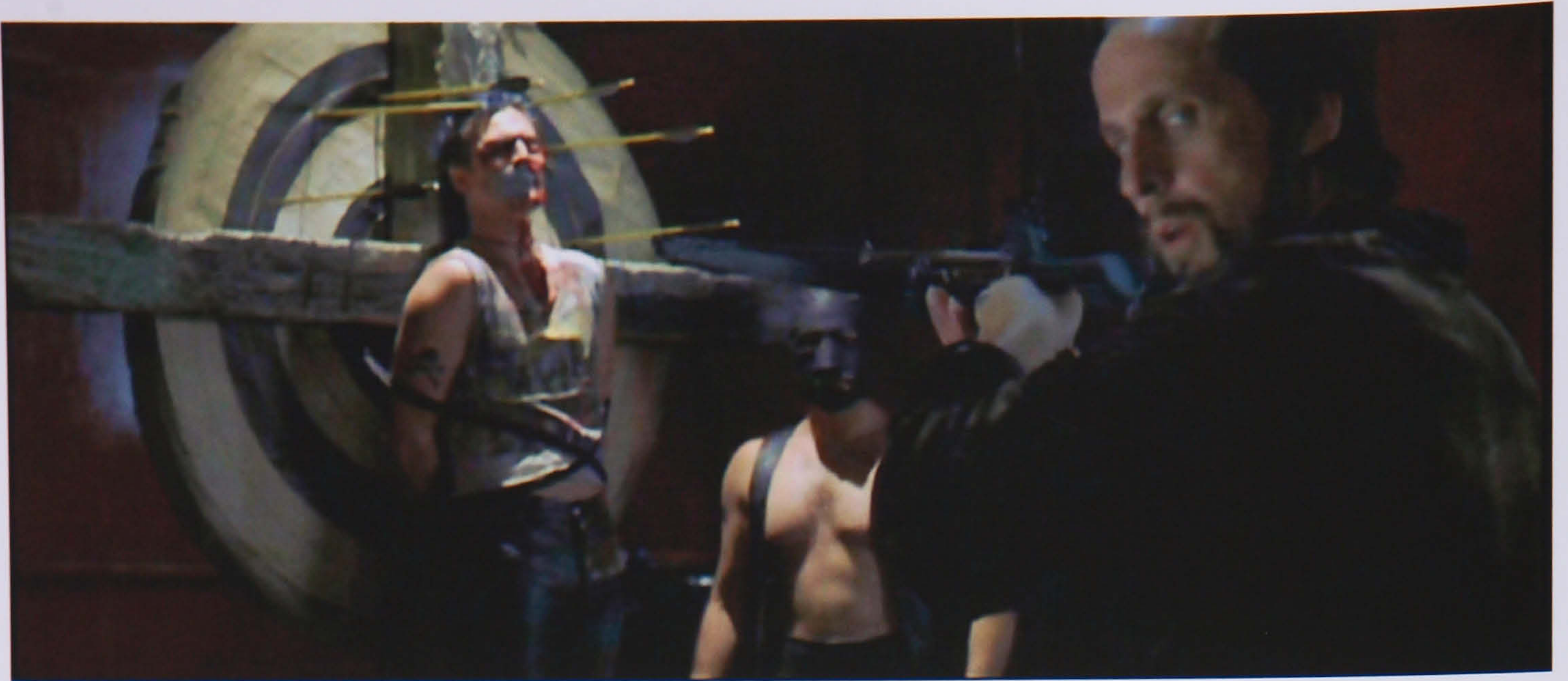


Figure 2.10 Aestheticized death awaiting Max California in *8mm*

Capturing Eddie, his desire to know and feel Mary Anne's fate compels Tom to take his prisoner to the scene of her death. What follows is not retribution but the spectacle of the controlled body, a performance of suffering. Repeatedly asking variations of 'Why?' and 'I want to know', Tom verbally and, in some respects, physically, recreates Mary Anne's death scene with Eddie, but with Eddie positioned as the controlled body. The narrative's emphasis on Mary Anne serves to disguise that once again it is the male body, rather than the female, that is explored. Furthermore, it camouflages the fact that Tom's masochistic desire to know how it felt has shifted to wanting to *show* Eddie (and the audience) what it felt like.

Tom has already declared that he will 'never get tired of hurting' Eddie, so rather than killing him, he re-enacts the spectacle of suffering, using electrical flex to bind Eddie's neck to his hands behind his back. At his moment of utter subjection, tied up as if in a BDSM scene, Eddie recognizes the power of masochism: paradoxically, by accepting the inevitability of his death, he is able to prevent it (albeit temporarily).

Eddie calls Tom a 'faggot' and a 'pussy' (both opposing traditional concepts of masculinity), orders him to 'Pull the fucking trigger', and removes Tom's control by proclaiming he will not cry, and even fellates the barrel of the gun thrust into his face. The dynamic and spectacle of control is based on BDSM, and although

obviously devoid of consent, the importance of permission is tackled directly in the scene.

Unable to bring himself to kill Eddie, Tom telephones Mary Anne's mother. Using the excuse of her saying she wanted to know what happened to her daughter no matter what (a masochistic drive in itself), he requests, 'Give me your permission to hurt them [the perpetrators]; please.' Janet's statement that she loved her daughter is taken by Tom as an authorization to kill Eddie, but it also conforms to a structure of BDSM. Using the work of John Alan Lee (1983),³⁰ Anne McClintock has described how 'S/M rituals may be called *rituals of recognition*.... [P]articipants seek a witness – to trauma, pain, pleasure or power' (1993, 224). Thus, as Lee argues: 'Each partner served as an audience to the other' (1983, 189). Tom is seeking a witness to his control of Eddie, and his reciprocity lies with Janet (confirmed by the letter she later sends to him stating, 'I realize you and I are probably the only people that ever really cared about Mary Anne'). Unable to confront the consent to pain in BDSM, the film only hints at the combination by displacing the permission onto a third party. Thus, it corrupts the consensual dynamic of BDSM.

One final point about *8mm* can be distinguished from the unmasking of Machine, and is worthy of contrasting with what we shall discover in *Sick*. Having established that involvement with the combination of sex and pain can corrupt, the other revelation in *8mm* is that Machine, or George as he is named, is only a fat man who needs glasses and resides with his mother.³¹ Questioning whether Tom expected a monster, George embarks on a monologue declaring:

³⁰ John Alan Lee is in turn using the work of Erving Goffman in *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (1975). Goffman proposes that participants in events use social frames to provide meaning to actions within specific contexts. Lee applies the 'theatrical frame' to BDSM with its notions of scripting and control.

³¹ His features and background are remarkably akin to the cinematic profile of a serial killer; indeed his chubby face is not dissimilar to the serial killer played by Victor Buono in *The Strangler* (Burt Topper, USA, 1963). If recognized as such, the depiction brings yet more disgrace to BDSM.

I wasn't beaten. I wasn't molested. Mommy didn't abuse me. Daddy never raped me. I'm only what I am.... There's no mystery. Things I do, I do them because I like them. Because I want to.

As we shall see, where *Sick* uses images of domesticity to stress that BDSM and 'normal' are not mutually exclusive, *8mm* not only juxtaposes Tom's home life with a world involving BDSM, but also issues a paranoid cry that BDSMers are amongst us. That George enjoys BDSM (remember, there is only one snuff film), and therefore, unlike Eddie, gets pleasure from pain rather than profit, means he is classified as the most deviant of them all. Pleasure and pain remain irreconcilable in *8mm*.

'You always hurt the one you love.'

Winner of the Special Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival and Best Feature at the Los Angeles Independent Film Festival, Kirby Dick's 1997 documentary *Sick* has been controversial. In Australia, the Minister Responsible for Censorship banned the film, before discovering she had breached her own legislative guidelines (Spencer, 1999), and in the UK, when the film was shown on television as part of a late-night season of contentious programmes, it was cut by eleven minutes, yet still attracted five viewer complaints (none were upheld).³² The video release also suffered compulsory cuts by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) totalling 3 minutes 42 seconds. Of particular concern was the detailed performance of Bob hammering a nail through his penis, but the BBFC also required cuts to BDSM scenes (including asphyxiation and the insertion of a metal ball in his rectum) on the grounds that they 'would be highly dangerous if copied and which are likely to encourage imitation in viewers with an existing interest in sado-masochistic activity'

³² In the USA, Bob Flanagan had already featured on Senator Jesse Helm's hit list of artists receiving money from the National Endowment of the Arts.

(BBFC, 2001). Evidently, the disquiet relates to stimulation, both of ideas and BDSM pleasures. It is incredible that a film that concentrates on male masochism, both as a sexual act and as performance art, generates an anxiety founded on it looking so appealing people may wish to copy it. What a marked contrast to the mainstream films that fearfully hide masochism behind sadism. The film therefore raises issues about its representation of a particular type of controlled body, and the important relationship between performance and BDSM.

The film states (as did most reviews of Flanagan's performances), that Bob Flanagan was an artist, masochist, and one of the longest living survivors of cystic fibrosis (CF), a genetic disease that effectively causes you to drown in your own mucus. Alas, the epigram that originally ended the statement, that he should be dead by now, but instead he nails his dick to a board, is no longer true; he died at the age of 43, an incident that forms the denouement of Kirby Dick's documentary. However, both death and the punished penis form parallel targets in the film because the two trajectories of CF and BDSM dominated Bob Flanagan's life. The dual 'pathologies', one physical, the other mental, intersect and form the unitary term of the title: *Sick*.³³

The irony of the term becomes apparent through the film showing that Bob refuses to give in to the physical illness by partaking in the pejoratively categorized sexual pursuit: as Bob homeopathically puts it, 'I've learned to fight sickness with sickness' (in Juno and Vale 1993, 3). That he should be defined as a degenerate, both bodily and morally, is further undermined by the film. We see him in the position of counsellor at a CF summer camp, a role we are told he held from 1973 to 1995. Entertaining a bunch of school kids and guardians around a campfire by singing songs about a woman called Ivy (because she was on IV). in-between drawing

³³ Bob had previously used the wordplay for his show *Bob Flanagan's Sick* (1991).

heavily on his oxygen supply, he presents the face of a benevolent clown. Similarly, his meetings with Sara, a teenage girl who suffers from CF, via the granting of her request placed through the Make a Wish Foundation, shows him to be disarmingly charming and slightly shy. Her desire to have a nipple piercing during their second meeting, throughout which Bob comforts her by holding her hand, is not coincidental. Her interpretation of Bob Flanagan's predilection for BDSM, that it is a way of obtaining a form of control over the body denied by the disease, seems correct, and this facet was something that made Bob and his BDSM actions attractive to her (in spite of her mother's protestations that it 'wasn't the S&M'). In her own smaller way, Sara's piercing, like those of many piercees, is designed to achieve a form of mastery over pain (of which I will say more in Chapter 3). Thus, Bob is a counsellor, a normal sing-a-long guy, and inspirational mentor figure, yet also a connoisseur of BDSM and extreme performance artist.

The film constantly returns to his ordinariness and respectability: he was a poster boy for a cystic fibrosis foundation, his parents discuss his motivations around the kitchen table, and his brother says the young Bob was a 'moral cop'. As a point of contrast, at a Thanksgiving dinner, the family of Bob's partner, collaborator and dominatrix, Sheree Rose, is revealed to be screamingly dysfunctional.³⁴ Later in the film too, Sheree is depicted as the nasty sadist trying to manipulate Bob into having forty-two spansks to commemorate his birthday, whilst he protests he is too ill. But it is too easy to demonize the sadist. Sheree may seem a bit of a bitch, but she never truly fulfils our expectations of a sadist. Robert Ebert is correct to record that 'In Rose he [Bob] found a woman who was a true dominatrix, not just a kinky actress with bizarre costumes' (1997). Apart from a scene when she is in a surgical apron

³⁴ The familial scene resembles those in *Crumb* (Terry Zwigoff, USA, 1994), a comparable biographical documentary of another sexual outcast, the counter-culture cartoonist famous for Fritz the Cat and Mr Natural, Robert Crumb.

and another where she wears a basque, Sheree Rose's attire makes her. like Bob, normality personified. Everything is so normal that:

In fact, *Sick*, for all its perversity, is in many respects exactly the kind of movie that Americans, in particular, adore: it is, among other things, a love story, a comedy, a tale of courage, a true-life example of triumph (however temporary) over adversity, and even a disease-of-the-week flick.³⁵ (D'Angelo 1997)

Much the same could be said of *Secretary*. But it is not quite that simple, because for most people, BDSM is irreconcilable with normality (as we saw with the 'shock' revelation of Machine). Through being sick, yet benign, Bob destabilizes perceptions of BDSM, and the film helps explain why meeting with him prompted Robert Stoller to substantially rethink his views of 'perversion' (Kauffman 1998a, 35).³⁶

Kirby Dick (and Bob and Sheree, who collaborated on editing *Sick*) seem self-consciously aware of the film's break from traditional cinematic depictions of the controlled body and BDSM. The puns of their collaborative video *Leather from Home* (1983)³⁷ allude to how humour is frequently employed (as we saw with *The Producers* and *Preaching to the Perverted*) to cope with BDSM. Another sequence in *Sick* shows Sheree pestering Bob about what she will be left in his will. Confronting both humour and the expectation that BDSM is about torture, Sheree asks, 'Am I coercing you in any way?' before the camera pans to reveal she is pulling a cord tied around Bob's testicles. And the most conventional depiction of BDSM comes after the visit of Sara. As Bob acts out what he calls Sheree's fantasy,

³⁵ In particular, the hospital deathbed scene, the aftermath of gathered friends, and the closing cine film of childhood are very reminiscent of *Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, USA, 1993), another film tackling disease and sexuality.

³⁶ See also Robert Stoller's comment about one of the subjects he interviewed in which he states 'the one with the fiercest practices, had had the worst childhood experiences with pain because he was born with a life-threatening illness, cystic fibrosis' (1991, 26). The comment appears to be an oblique reference to Flanagan.

³⁷ If indicated in the film, I have provided dates for the individual works of art shown in *Sick*. However, because these include a range of material such as videos, performance pieces, and installations that are not permanent and cannot be accessed by the public, they are not listed separately at the end of the thesis. Instead, under the listing 'Exhibitions and Works of Art', I have included details of Bob Flanagan's major exhibitions to indicate where some of these pieces have been shown.

he swigs from a bottle and pops pills. Becoming lecherous and seemingly out of control, he shouts, 'Fucking make a wish.... Let's see if we can make you Supermasochist too.... Sheree, God damn it, put the nipple clips on her.' The moment resembles psychopathic Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper) in *Blue Velvet*, as he inhales his gas and switches between baby and daddy before the masochistic Dorothy (Isabella Rossellini). In other words, Bob becomes the familiar image of BDSM: the sadist.

Mostly though, Bob's performances and installations break with tradition by concentrating on male masochism, with his later ones in particular, intertwining BDSM and CF. The most pronounced example shown in *Sick* is *CF/SM* (n.d.), which is a collection of children's alphabet building blocks with the alternating abbreviations of SM and CF interspersed with the occasional block showing images of padlocks, stethoscopes and leather hoods. Because of their interdependence, it may appear that the masochism Bob displays is structured as only being apposite for masking extreme diseases, and has no basis in 'normal' people. To rethink Bob's terms, how can you fight sickness with sickness if you do not have a malady in the first place? But as I have outlined, in spite of Bob's differing lifestyle, his ordinariness always pervades his character. What both Bob Flanagan's performances and the tone of *Sick* achieve is a defamiliarization of medicine. The aesthetics of medical suffering become the aesthetics of BDSM performance. Thus, alongside the scars on his chest from pain play is the ever-present porta-cath (catheter) that is there for the administering of antibiotics. Compatibly, his *X-Ray With Nipple Rings* (n.d.) has his diseased lungs as the dark background to isolate the two large nipple rings he sports. Disease and BDSM are fused in a medicalized vision.

Flanagan's *Visible Man* (1992) has a similar function: a child's anatomical toy takes on the abject but also sensuous acts of producing shit, mucus and ejaculate. The

art object features in the installation *Visiting Hours* (1992-3; 1994; 1995), alongside a hospital gurney as a bed of nails, a paediatrician's waiting room with BDSM magazines, and Bob in a hospital bed from which he is dragged into the air by his feet. The ritualistic implements and procedures of hospitals and disease have been co-opted into BDSM and desire, just as I described in *Dead Ringers*. Bob reveals BDSM borrows from the structures of power in wider society and uses them for pleasure through conversion.

What the film stresses is the role of staging and performance. Pain is not Bob's pleasure: the struggle to breathe under the suffocating disease is not what excites him, but being asphyxiated by Sheree is. He states in the film:

I don't get turned on by slamming my hand in a car door, and I don't get turned on by being treated badly, but, with the right relationship and the right, um, right context, I am turned on.

As Robert Stoller notes in respect of pain, 'The distinctions, though fine, are precise' (1991, 16), and the precision permits the exquisite pain. Paul H. Gebhard extends this view, observing, 'Accidental pain is not perceived as pleasurable or sexual. The average sadomasochistic session is usually scripted.... Often the phenomenon reminds one of a planned ritual or theatrical production' (1983, 37). Thus, BDSM accords with Bob's performances in its awareness of timing, display of paraphernalia and address of an audience (for the masochist and the sadist are the audience to each other in BDSM pursuits). The theatricality is about showing and delineating, therefore 'The pain of S&M is defined differently because it is a method by which partners maintain their dominant and submissive roles. It is a means to an end' (Kamel 1983b, 167). In *Visiting Hours*, Bob re-brands the pain of the intrusive medical treatments as both performed spectacle and personal control. Like Patrick D. Hopkins's justification of BDSM as simulation not replication, it involves the same

physical acts but the context and meanings are changed.

In 'What are Big Boys Made Of?' (1993), Leon Hunt uses Paul Willemen's comments in 'Looking at the Male' (1981) in conjunction with Steve Neale's work in 'Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema' (1983) to probe the spectacle of the male hero of the epic. Hunt distinguishes four characteristics that define the Hollywood version of the genre. Remarkably, *Sick*, in spite of being an independent, non-fiction film, fits perfectly into the first three categories, and with a slight twist, matches the fourth too.

Firstly, in the epic there is 'A heroic, central male character, after whom the film is named' (1993, 66). Blatantly, Bob Flanagan, who, as he states in the film, has been 'both plagued and empowered' by CF, fits the bill.

Secondly, Hunt notes that, 'The hero is somehow "transfigured" and becomes more than a man' (1993, 66). As the film title suggests, Bob has been exalted into a Supermasochist, a kind of Superman of the BDSM world, complete with oxygen mask, surgical gown cape, and a weight suspended from his scrotum (figure 2.11). Hunt elaborates that there may also be 'religious overtones' (1993, 66), and Flanagan, besides having a crown of thorns tattooed around his pudendum, frequently references Christianity in his work. In *Sick*, we see his 1994 work *The Ascension* (part of *Visiting Hours*) taking place in the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. The performance involves Flanagan being 'resurrected' from his staged sickbed through being hoisted into the air by his feet to hang as a living canvas. In between these moments, the bed acts as a confessional site for the gallery visitors as they share their experiences of disease with Flanagan (Kauffman 1998b, 33), and a personal confessional site when Bob is interviewed. For some reason though, Bob's explicit actions absolve all the confessions of guilt, especially as he completes the religious correlation by stating from his staged



Figure 2.11 Discreetly censored version of Bob Flanagan as Supermasochist on the cover of *Bob Flanagan: Supermasochist* by Juno and Vale (1993)

sickbed, ‘Certainly Christ is the very first, or the most famous, masochist.’³⁸

The correlation of religion, especially Catholicism, is hardly surprising, for as Anne McClintock indicates, ‘S/M is the most liturgical of forms, sharing with Christianity a theatrical iconography of punishment and expiation: washing rituals, bondage, flagellation, body-piercing and symbolic torture’ (1993, 222). But this is where BDSM unsettles fundamentally held beliefs: where Christ’s suffering was redemptive, Flanagan does it for performative and sexual pleasure. In addition to breaking preconceptions of pain always being unpleasurable, BDSM transgresses the solemnity of suffering, and privileges the personal over humankind.

The third trait Hunt identifies is ‘The display of the male body’ (1993, 66); *Sick* is centred on Bob’s body. Using Willemen’s notion of the ‘unquiet pleasure’ (1981,

³⁸ Bob’s interest in the ‘saintliness of suffering’ (Flanagan in Juno and Vale 1993, 13) is evident in his published comments too, stating as he does that ‘I think I related my suffering and illness to the suffering of Jesus on the cross – the idea that suffering in some way was kind of holy’ (Flanagan in Juno and Vale 1993, 13).

16), Hunt links the display to repressed homosexual voyeurism. Undoubtedly, Flanagan's body is open to all manner of sexualized looking, whether specifically BDSM related, homosexual, heterosexual or bisexual, but his punishment certainly gives a justification for the male gaze (should it be needed), which equates to Willemen's belief that the homosexual voyeurism is repressed. Also of interest is Hunt's isolating of three specific generic set pieces, the chariot race, crucifixion and gladiatorial combat, all of which involve endangering the male body: the epitome of Flanagan's display.

The fourth, and ostensibly the most problematic criteria for *Sick* to replicate, is the delivery of 'love stories between heterosexual men' (1993, 67). The love affair in *Sick* is heterosexual: between Bob and his long-term partner Sheree.³⁹ However, if we reconsider the definition to mean a taboo love that unsettles heterosexual polarities, a tone in keeping with Hunt and Willemen's hypotheses, then a BDSM relationship between a man and a dominating woman (a role conventionally classified as masculine), is comparable to 'love stories between heterosexual men', if not an exact match.

By replicating in so many ways Hunt's defining qualities of the epic, it is to be expected that *Sick* also activates similar questions about the display of the male body.

Willemen states of the films of Anthony Mann:

The viewer's experience is predicated on the pleasure of seeing the male 'exist' (that is, walk, move, ride, fight) in or through cityscapes, landscapes or, more abstractly, history. And on the unquiet pleasure of seeing the male mutilated ... and restored through violent brutality. (1981, 16)

It may seem ironic and insensitive, but a film about a man dying of CF is fundamentally about seeing him living (at least for the majority of the film), and so, watching Bob Flanagan 'exist' is an important pleasure in *Sick*. Equally imperative

³⁹ Bob and Sheree first met in 1980, and Bob died on 4 January 1996.

though, is his mutilation (via performed BDSM), and the restoration of his physical wellbeing by ‘violent brutality’ (using BDSM to fight CF).

Hunt proceeds by identifying a certain type of male star whose presence and body prompts admiration and desire. Where Hunt presents Charlton Heston in *El Cid* (Anthony Mann, USA/Spain, 1961) as displaying ‘the innate splendour of honest muscle and strong-jawed virtue’ (David Thomson in Hunt 1993, 68), Flanagan offers up a puny body full of scars, frequently hidden behind an oxygen mask and tubing, and constantly coughing. Flanagan even draws attention to his failure to match up to a cinematic ideal, stressing ‘I have to apologize for my, you know, my body, [it] is kinda thin, ... and I should workout more and lift weights or something. I’m certainly no Arnold Schwarzenegger.’ However, he continues by challenging ‘But can Arnold do this?’ at which point he reveals a large weight hanging from his testicles (figure 2.12). Ridiculing the former Mr Universe by labelling him ‘Mr Terminator-Man’, he defies concepts of masculinity via the very site on the body that is supposed to define being a man. At once satirizing machismo, Flanagan reconfirms it via endurance, so that in the words of his poem ‘Why:’ he asserts ‘HE’S GOT MORE BALLS THAN I DO’ (1985, 65).⁴⁰ The scene comes just after Flanagan has nailed his scrotum to some wood, and later he is represented as castrated, his testicles and penis sewn up inside his body as if permanently removed. The image discredits the supposed symbolic castration fear of the ideal ego. Rather than the ideal being ‘something to which the subject is never adequate’ (Neale 1983, 7), the ideal cannot compete with the masochistic subject. However, such a psychoanalytic reading does not do *Sick* justice, for Bob is playing with the very notion of defining the body, gender and sexuality in such a way.

⁴⁰ The phrase was said to Bob Flanagan after he volunteered to be caned and spanked at a BDSM party (Flanagan in Juno and Vale 1993, 43).



Figure 2.12 Bob Flanagan offering an alternative version of masculinity in *Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan, Supermasochist*

Leon Hunt examines Neale's point that 'Where women are investigated, men are tested. Masculinity, as an ideal, at least, is implicitly known' (Neale 1983, 16). Hunt proposes that the epics investigate masculinity whilst testing it (1993, 65). This seems to be exactly Flanagan's *raison d'être*, and like Hunt's view of the epic, debunks the notion that masculinity is 'implicitly known'. Yet, differences remain.

In respect of the male body in films, Neale finds 'our look is not direct, it is heavily mediated by the looks of the characters involved' (1983, 14). However, *Sick* does not employ such structures. It is true that we see Bob performing before diegetic audiences, but these are nearly always out of frame, and certainly do not form a pattern of reverse reaction shots that would be more usual for a documentary about an entertainer. Further, the performances, whether stage acts, or filmed pieces such as *Autopsy* (1994), are frontal and include close-ups that address the viewer. Rather than either repressing the erotic component of the male body, or deflecting it via a series of looks, *Sick* offers the male form for close inspection. In accordance with Laura Mulvey's defining description of how the *female* body is displayed (and so is treated differently to the male's), Flanagan's body, 'stylized and fragmented by

close-ups. is the content of the film and the direct recipient of the spectator's look' (1975, 14). The sole sanctioning feature of the display is the act of mutilating the male body. But as the film, and BDSM make clear. this is a flaunting of pleasure not pain. Thus, rather than hiding it, what appears to be marked out is the sexualized male body. However, *Sick*, via Bob Flanagan's BDSM pursuits and performances, erases many of the boundaries between male and female, masculinity and femininity. In *The Scaffold* (1991), his body is fragmented into separate fetishized components. Close-ups of his two hands, two feet, head, chest and genitals are screened on seven televisions arranged in an X shape to reproduce the human body (figure 2.13). Each screen shows that part of the body involved in a masochistic BDSM act. What one would expect to define his sex (if not his gender), his penis, is demoted to only one-seventh of his sexual being. What is more, in some shots the penis is effectively removed, being sewn up into Bob's body. The fragmented form, as a site of BDSM, reveals the lie of defining oneself via one organ in the body.

Flanagan throws not only sexuality, but also gender roles into turmoil. Besides simulating castration, Bob is anally penetrated by Sheree, he submits to her demands, and enjoys rather than shuns certain types of pain, not in a noble way (as in the self-sacrifice of *Spartacus* (Stanley Kubrick, USA, 1960), where Spartacus' comrades all declare 'I am Spartacus' in an attempt to be crucified instead of their leader), but in a lustful empowering manner. If masculinity is defined as resisting pain, then Bob proves his machismo, but to search out the pain, and to experience it as gratifying, exquisite pain, runs contrary to being a man. Similarly, the scenes of Sheree dominating him, such as in *Autopsy* and *Leather From Home*, reverse the patriarchal order of active male passive female. BDSM is frequently championed for this very attribute, for, as already mentioned, its performance of power reveals all hierarchies of power in wider society to be performed constructs, and not intrinsically correct.



Figure 2.13 Bob Flanagan's *The Scaffold* reveals the multiplicity of BDSM sexuality in *Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan, Supermasochist*

But is a woman beating a man truly transgressive?

BDSM sex may point to an alternative, but if safely contained in a fantasy space, especially a commercially organized one involving a professional dominatrix and a male client, the challenge to structures of oppression is isolated. It remains little more than another male pleasure within a male dominated world: the man retains both financial clout and, like all masochists, as Bob Flanagan admits, 'full control', for he gives the top the right to dominate him (in Juno and Vale 1993, 32). In other words, in the Bakhtinian sense, BDSM is like the carnival, acting as a 'temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank' (Bakhtin 1968, 10). And after moments of excess and authority overturned, the status quo is resumed. If this is all that is achieved, then it would be right to deny *Sick* any claim to transgression, but I believe that it, like BDSM, does more. BDSM need not be transgressive to be pleasurable and worthy of depiction, but if it threatens to transgress, it might explain Hollywood's reluctance to depict male masochism.

In 'Is Transgression Transgressive?', Elizabeth Wilson argues that 'the term transgression in a sexual context implies not only shock but – perhaps most strongly

– forbidden pleasures’ (1993, 111). If we accept Wilson’s contention, Flanagan certainly transgresses. The point then becomes that ‘we have to have an idea of how things could be different, otherwise transgression ends in mere posturing’ (Wilson 1993, 116). Flanagan offers the idea, but he also offers the life. He prefers being a full-time slave to being an artist; he may perform the masochist role in public, but he also lives it in private. His desire was to be controlled by Sheree not to have BDSM sex with her. The contract with her renounces his gratification and prioritizes hers. Of course, the film, partly as a result of its visual properties, partly a product of conventional storytelling, and partly because ‘SM basically is a silly thing to *watch*’ (Flanagan in Juno and Vale 1993, 97), is not concerned with the mundane acts of control, and concentrates on the performed spectacles. But as Bob has stated elsewhere,

a typical scene had a lot more to do with attitude – with me being submissive and doing work around the house, running Sheree’s errands – really boring! Most of the SM stuff we did was just me doing a lot of work for her – that was the *real* SM part of it! (In Juno and Vale 1993, 58)

Leather from Home, albeit with puns about punishment, points to the domestic reality.

The most commented on performance in the film is where Bob hammers a nail through his penis to the jocular soundtrack of ‘The Hammer of Love’. Shown in extreme close-up, visually negating any hope of a diegetic audience to mediate our looks, we are forced to accept our position of spectatorship. The visceral image gets under our skin and sticks in our minds: it almost has a physical presence. Interpreted as debunking ‘the penis’s prestige and the phallus’s authority’ (Kauffman 1998a, 37), what could be more manly than attacking your own manhood? Exposing the phallus to be no more than flesh and blood is not the limit of the scene, for gender identity is confused. Having rotated the flaccid penis to show the nail protruding fully through,

the metal spike is removed. Cutting to a lower angle, the penis spurts blood in a sanguineous version of the ‘money shot’ of porn films. Only a layer of glass shields the camera, and acts as a reassuring protective barrier for the spectator’s gaze. The scene fuses the menstrual female with the ejaculating male as the phallus loses its masculine integrity. This slippage between male and female replicates Bob’s own description earlier in the film of his first experience of nailing his penis. Reading from his journal, he recalls how the blood had made the room look like a murder scene, and that afterwards he had ‘methodically cleaned everything up just like Tony Perkins’ in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho*. The significance, besides BDSM again borrowing from popular culture, is that Bob has swung from victim to perpetrator. The shift is made even more apparent in the remainder of the journal entry (not read in the film), where Bob continues by stating ‘my blood swirling down the sink like Janet Leigh’s’ (in Juno and Vale 1993, 54). What Flanagan points towards is what Anne McClintock discovered in her study of BDSM magazines: ‘Identity shifts libidiously’ (1993, 226). As Bob performs, he is sadist *and* masochist, active and passive, fulfilling both sides of the imposed dichotomy, and offering the combination as spectacle. He dissolves the formation of gender and the hypocrisy of our relationship towards our gendered body fluids.

Fundamentally, Bob’s greatest transgression is embracing the power of submission, which encompasses the threat of presenting male passivity and the fluidity of gender boundaries. Through choosing pain and domination, and performing his own subjection, he takes control. ‘People don’t think of the masochist as being a strong person,’ states Bob in the film, but his performance of hammering a nail into his penis pictorializes how wrong they are. The major threat of BDSM (both in terms of the sadist and the masochist) is its reconstitution of control as fun. Domination is demeaned into theatrical play, submission is shrivelled into contented

rejection of responsibility, and humiliation is humbled into satisfying need. With no resistance, and in fact embracement, the power of oppression is lost. Control loses all value except as a dramatic tool for pleasure. It is noticeable that the bloody penis forms the first closure of *Sick*. As it ends, the screen fades to black and opens on the dismantling of Bob's *Visiting Hours* show. There are no more performance sequences in the film; Bob's bloody climax is the pinnacle of control. All that follows is the build up to the ultimate loss of control: death. More painful than the mutilated penis, Bob's dying gasps of 'I don't understand it' confirm Kauffman's assessment of Bob's body of work: he shows 'Death, not sex, is the last mystique in contemporary culture' (1998a, 38). But as the credits run, even in death Bob finds space (via his foresight into his own mortality) to take control. After singing a composition entitled 'Fun to be Dead', he pokes his tongue out, complete with piercing, at the whole idea of the masochist losing control.

In spite of all that I have outlined above, the quality that most emphatically discriminates *Sick*'s depiction of BDSM from a mainstream contemporary film is how the controlled body fits into the relationship between Sheree and Bob. Robert Ebert (1997) argues that in Sheree, in addition to finding a dominatrix, Bob 'also found a life partner'. Sheree and Bob's relationship is a loving, long-lasting and committed one. It is not part of some sleazy underbelly of society, it is not a prostitute doing things for the money, and it is not a risqué one night stand; it is a form of matrimony, the only difference being the contract is not signed in the vestry but is carved on Bob's body in the shape of Sheree's first initial (figure 2.14). The ceremony was videoed as *Bob & Sheree's Contract* (1982) and contains the usual wedding components of photography, and the solemn vows of love, honouring and obeying, especially the latter. *Sick* illustrates their absolute devotion to each other, even during moments of anguish such as Sheree saying she *needs* Bob to submit to



Figure 2.14 Bob and Sheree's contract being signed by Sheree on Bob's body in *Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan, Supermasochist*

her when he is in too much pain to do so, and when she is later forced to proclaim, 'I don't even think he is a masochist anymore.' *Sick* codes the control of BDSM in terms of love. One performance in particular, *Autopsy*, addresses the issue in detail.

The scene opens with Bob displayed naked like a cadaver on a hospital gurney; the dark and dingy garage setting, including shelves of paint pots and cables, is familiarly homely, but also seems to reference countless cinematic murder scenes, a sense reinforced by Sheree appearing in a white surgical apron that later becomes splattered with blood. Her first words are, 'Look at that face; I actually fell in love with that face the first time I saw him.' The impassive Bob has his head stroked and his chest caressed as the scene cloaks itself in the tone of a lover's poignant farewell. Sheree recalls how Bob had wanted to give his whole body to her as her slave, and she lovingly teases how it was not much of a body, but she had decided to do the best she could with it, and had 'done a lot over the years'. She continues by rubbing his cheek as she describes how skinny he was when she met him; the corporeal zone leads easily into her discussing how she had seen women slapping men in movies, and she and Bob had replicated it. Concentrating on the art of where and where not to

slap, she simultaneously and theatrically prolongs the moment to enhance Bob's anticipation, whilst the lingering touch that follows each stroke imbues the act with love.

Again building tension, Sheree talks of re-enacting the sexualized asphyxiation scenes of *Ai no Corrida/In the Realm of the Senses* (Nagisa Oshima, Japan/France, 1976), and discloses that after seeing the film she had always wanted to choke someone with a chord. And yet, she continues as she strangles Bob, 'I never wanted to kill them.' As Bob lies unperturbed, underscored is the consent of the scene: a sexual and performative collaboration. What is more, it is a pleasurable one, as Bob's purrs justify. The scene is BDSM divorced from the one-sided sadism or deviant lust of most contemporary cinema, but happily married in a loving, caring relationship.

The scene continues with some play piercing. Putting on rubber gloves (both practical and fetishistic), Sheree stresses the need to 'put some thought into it', thus rejecting any notion that BDSM is mindless violence. Even more convincing at dispelling myths is the knife she then produces, for it was given to her by Bob; what in any Hollywood film would be an instrument of pain is in *Sick* a token of love, for it is 'not to kill a person or maim a person, but ... the idea is to scare them a little bit ... and also to create certain body sensations,' says Sheree. We are witnessing the sincere bond of bondage when Sheree draws the blade along Flanagan's vulnerable penis. The scene announces that BDSM is about closeness, security, absolute trust and absolute control. It is a complex play of power and pleasure involving mutual satisfaction; as Sheree states, 'if they like to have it done to them, I love to do it to them.' The love may not be founded on actions we ourselves use to express love, although we may be hard put to distinguish which is the more honourable, a bruise from a lovingly and carefully placed clothes peg or a lustfully produced lovebite, but it is love without any doubt. For all its concentration on spectacle, BDSM turns out

to be very cerebral. The temporary scars Sheree makes on Bob's body are important; she notes, 'There's a lot of memory involved with S/M.' The remembrance adds to the anticipation of the next session, and through getting excited talking about them, and Bob feeling the sensations of the marks several days later. BDSM once more shows how it distances the act of sex, and sexualizes the whole body not just zones related to sex and gender. Indeed, you can read the marks on Bob's skin as a history of their relationship. Wallace Baine of the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* reviews their relationship correctly when he states, 'the harsh language of S&M they used between them was indeed a lovers' dialogue' (1997). And as Bob is spanked and has the huge metal ball shoved up his anus, his moans, situated between agony and ecstatic lust, dispel the dichotomy of pain and pleasure, and voice an exquisite pain, however uncomfortable we as spectators might imagine it. Bob may be somewhat special; a Supermasochist even, but Sheree's comment that 'you can never forget having someone like this in your life' is based on love not respect or astonishment. It comes as no surprise then that the scene ends with more loving caresses, before a highly affectionate, and suitably gentle, kiss.

What we can therefore conclude from a comparison of *8mm* and *Sick*, is how openly and positively the latter addresses BDSM in relation to the controlled body. In particular, through a constitution recognizable from the epic, *Sick* embraces and exults the potential of male masochism. In contrast, *8mm* employs BDSM for its spectacle, but uses the female body as a decoy for the elements of male masochism. Consequently, whilst *Sick* sets up challenges to accepted concepts of sex and gender, *8mm* is content to label all that is 'other', in which it includes BDSM as well as snuff, as deviant.

Both films are intrigued by the aesthetics of suffering and the pleasures of the controlled body. Where Tom Welles and *8mm* cannot understand why, *Sick*, via Bob

Flanagan, offers the answer, not least in his poem 'Why:', which he narrates at the end of *Sick*. But Welles cannot understand because he asks the right question, but applies it to the wrong thing. Welles is asking why the snuff film was made, not what are the pleasures of the controlled body (which would answer the question why). Thus, he only gets the answers of 'because he could' and 'because I want to'. The film indicates these pleasures to the audience by deliberately hiding them. In other words, we recognize our own curiosity for what is withheld, namely the controlled body (we never fully see what happens to either Mary Anne or Eddie Poole). *Sick*, however, shows all, and confirms our interest in the controlled body. We may look away, but more often than not, we look back. *Sick* does not try to condense the answer; the mass of reasons contained in 'Why:' still provide no resolution. But unlike Welles, Bob recognizes his fascination and accepts it. Until Welles, *8mm* and the majority of mainstream films address it too, rather than merely exploiting it, BDSM will remain an ever-present but deviant spectacular pleasure of the controlled body.

3. Body Modification: Beauty and the Pleasures of the Modifiable Flesh

We must all go through a rite of passage. And it must be physical, it must be painful, and it must leave a mark.

Captain Howdy (Dee Snider) in *Strangeland* (John Pieplow, USA, 1998)

Body modification, the permanent and semi-permanent intervention on the body's surface such as tattooing, piercing, branding and cicatrization (scarification), would come quite low down on a list of recurrent cinematic themes. However, like BDSM imagery, body modification often slips through unnoticed, providing convenient but typically pejorative connotations of danger, perversion and threatening 'other' through characters such as villains, 'sexual deviants', and 'foreign' natives. More recently, it has appeared as subcultural background atmosphere in the guise of pierced punks and tattooed skinheads. A few films, however, utilize body modification as a structuring feature of the narrative, and explore the beliefs associated with these practices.

For the purposes of this chapter, I will use body modification to mean both culturally recognized acts like tattooing, piercing and scarification, but also actions that appear intertwined with or derived from them. What defines these additional procedures is, firstly, their permanent effect upon the body, which changes its shape or surface, and is done for control not necessity. In other words, ordinary surgery would not fit into this category, but plastic surgery could. Similarly, body building and dieting could be included on this basis. However, these are excluded by the second defining attribute: immediacy, the importance of which is a heightening of the act of control, for the effect is discernable instantly (or almost instantly). The third vital component is the relationship between pain, pleasure and beauty generated by the body modification. The marks connote control but also aestheticize the suffering into surface display. My primary focus is therefore representations of

radical body modifications that are grounded in the pleasures of perfecting and refiguring the body.

Where BDSM activities are primarily linked to sensual and sexual pleasures, body modification would seem designed for show first, and any alteration to senses would be secondary. However, the divide between BDSM and body modification is not clear-cut. Emerging from California in the 1970s, Modern Primitives established a 'subcultural movement in the intersection of the tattoo, piercing, and sado-masochism scenes' (Klesse 1999, 15). Reworking traditional ceremonies and rites of passage that involve piercing, marking, and physically intervening in the shape of the body (North American Indian Sun Dance, Hindu Ball Dance, breast sculpting etc.), the group members set out to respond to 'primal urges' (Fakir Musafar in Vale and Juno 1989a, 13), and fused spirituality with the pleasures, experiences, and aesthetics of body rituals.

Christian Klesse (1999) is highly critical of the concept of Modern Primitivism, regarding it as collapsing societal, geographical and historical diversity into a romanticized notion of the ethnic 'other', thus perpetuating the primitivist discourse it sets out to challenge. Bryan S. Turner approaches the subculture slightly differently, but with similar reservations. He contends that body modification cannot recapture 'primitiveness' because it takes place in a different social context. Where in pre-literate societies the marks were 'permanent, collective and largely obligatory' and 'could be read unambiguously' (1999, 39), they are now 'part of a personal and interior biography' (1999, 42) for they have shifted from 'compulsory rituals to optional decorations' (1999, 49). Klesse too notes the 'primitiveness' has been appropriated for 'a personal identification strategy' (1999, 34), and sees it employed to produce a 'radical critique of the repression of the body and sexuality in "Western" thought and morality' (1999, 34). With such a sexualized scenario

possible, we must not be too eager to segregate BDSM and body modification. Certainly, high-profile cinematic depictions of body modification have maintained the intertwining, and it is these films, in particular, *Tattoo*, *Boxing Helena* and *Crash*, I will discuss in this chapter.

But body modification does place additional emphasis on displaying and interpreting the visual signifiers of the marked body. Even in 2003, with piercings and tattoos very much part of mainstream culture, and not just undertaken by Modern Primitives, there is no overwhelming evidence to disprove Paul Sweetman's comment of 1999 that 'it would be misleading to label contemporary tattooing and piercing simply as fashionable products in the "supermarket of style"' (1999b, 72). Indeed, a commonly expressed motivation for altering the body is asserting control. Thus, a professional piercer describes how the act of piercing is frequently felt by women as a means 'to reclaim' their bodies (in Myers 1992, 282), a tattooed individual states 'there are few enough things I have control over and this is one of them' (in Benson 2000, 252), and in another survey, an interviewee felt becoming tattooed and pierced was 'a way of reasserting control of her body' (Sweetman 1999a, 173). Body modification therefore fits easily into a late modern condition that conceives the body as malleable and alterable, and so can be treated as an aesthetic project allowing it to be controlled and perfected to display your identity.

That body modification has become more visible, and is largely inspired by aesthetic and personal rather than ritual reasons, is not incidental to its cinematic incarnations. Indeed, the increased appearance of body modification themes in mainstream cinema has coincided with the explosion of interest in the wider culture. It is readily acknowledged, by anthropologists (Benson 2000), urban ethnographers (Myers 1992) and cultural theorists (Sweetman 1999a, 1999b; Curry 1993) that Western societies in the period since the 1960s, and more particularly, during the last

twenty years, have witnessed a demonstrable increase in the popularity of body modification. In the United Kingdom in the 1990s, piercings and tattoos sported by pop stars such as Keith from *The Prodigy* and the *Spice Girls* (alongside *Seal's* mysterious facial scarring) informed a high-profile fashion based on permanent body markings. Controversy arose (and continues) about such body modification practices. Discourses ranged from appellations (*Scary Spice* was apparently so called 'because of her wild ways, tattoos and pierced tongue' (Gannon 1997, 32)), through publicly broadcasted debates (including on radio, *Ruscoe on Five* (1997), and on television, *This Morning* (2000)), to questions of Royal Family leadership and the health of the nation (Princess Anne's daughter Zara Phillips had her tongue pierced, which prompted the press to examine the health implications, and the British Dental Authority to declare that a tongue piercing is 'a potential killer' (Murray 1999, 11)).

Similar concerns have been in operation in the USA. James Myers conducted an ethnographic study of non-mainstream body modification (genital piercing, branding, burning and cutting) in response to 'deep feelings of revulsion and resentment held by mainstream American society against these forms of body modification' (1992, 269). Moreover, Victoria Pitts undertook content analysis of USA and UK newspaper articles featuring body modification, and discovered 'the most recurrent issue raised is that body modifiers may be engaging in self-mutilation and thus may be mentally ill' (1999, 291). Just as we saw with BDSM, a pathologizing discourse is deployed, which repudiates the autonomy and control of body modification. With such heightened and contentious interest, it is therefore not surprising that body modification has had an impact on representations of control in mainstream cinema.

Skin-deep Beauty, Deep Down Control

Tattoos and tattooing have appeared sporadically as significant details in cinema

throughout its history. An example from the 1980s would be *The Jigsaw Murders* (Jag Mundhra, USA, 1988), which features a dismembered murder victim being identified by a dragon tattoo on her leg. Indeed, tattoos commonly provide the means by which people are tracked down and identified; we noted this in *8mm*, but it also occurs in *Lethal Weapon* (Richard Donner, USA, 1987), and many other films.¹ Comparably, a tattoo forms a map used to locate land in *Waterworld* (Kevin Reynolds, USA, 1995).

A more recent film puts a twist on the use of tattoos as clues. *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, USA, 2000) follows Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce) as he endeavours to trace the man who raped and murdered his wife. Unable to form new memories from the point of his wife's demise, Leonard relies on Polaroid photographs, scribbled notes, and critical facts (and factoids) tattooed on his body as *aides-mémoire*. As Leonard stands before the mirror, his body is an accumulation of clues and statements (figure 3.1). Effectively, the tattoos become a memory, a function that tattooees often triumph their marks as having; Paul Sweetman found tattoos to frequently be 'indelible reminders of more or less specifically defined episodes' (1999a, 174). But in *Memento*, they encompass Leonard's whole identity: defining his thoughts, beliefs and aims. Crucially, it is his deliberate decision to include a false piece of evidence as a tattoo that allows him control over his inability to remember. As soon as his memory of the event fades, he trusts the tattoo to be true and acts upon it.

Through mostly associating the social practice with law-breaking and deviance,

¹ This narrative ploy can certainly be traced back beyond *The Tattooed Stranger* (Edward J. Montagne, USA, 1950), but interestingly, in Montagne's film, just as in *Lethal Weapon*, it is a military emblem (Marines in the former film and Special Forces in the latter) that is the identifying tattoo. Tattoos can also mislead: the headless and limbless torso of a man is identified by its ship tattoo in *The House of Fear* (Roy William Neill, USA, 1945), but Sherlock Holmes (Basil Rathbone), later determines that the supposed victim is still alive, and had copied his own tattoo to make it appear he had been murdered.



Figure 3.1 Tattoos as memory in *Memento*

Hollywood perpetuates an historical link that saw tattooing ‘Established as a punitive or proprietary symbol in Greece, ... [and] continued through the Middle Ages in Europe as a means to mark the bodies of criminals’ (Fisher 2002, 93).² *The Night of the Hunter* (Charles Laughton, USA, 1955) famously has the preacher (Robert Mitchum) with LOVE and HATE tattooed on his knuckles, and apparently influenced the look of Robert De Niro’s character, Max Cady, in the remake of *Cape Fear* (Martin Scorsese, USA, 1991). As Helen Stoddart has argued, ‘His [Cady’s] tattoo-decorated body makes him both text and spectacle, ornament and action, passive and active object of the gaze’ (1995, 197). Examining the invasive body search of Cady where his tattoos are seen in close-up amidst a theme of penetration by hands, penis, the gaze and needles, Stoddart emphasizes the tattoos as a text that needs deciphering. But the focus on text prevents Stoddart noticing that the signs are given additional meaning by the way the body speaks through them. It is not merely what the signs denote, but how the body combines with the tattoos to connote more. Thus, the body is integral to the meaning, and matches Jill A. Fisher’s observation

² The trend exists in literature too. Perhaps most remarkably, Franz Kafka’s ‘In the Penal Settlement’ has the prisoner subjected to a machine that punishes him by literally writing the crime on his body via needles that puncture the skin. The criminal does not know his sentence, which will inevitably be death, but the officer in charge states: ‘He’ll learn it corporally, on his person’ (1949, 498), for he ‘deciphers it with his wounds’ (1949, 501).

about the collaboration between tattooist and tattooee so that the tattoo is ‘based on the client’s body, using the natural contours of the body to make a more beautiful tattoo’ (2002, 99).

Analysing the opening of *Cape Fear*, Stoddart sees the tattoo texts obscuring the book texts adorning Cady’s prison-cell wall. But this seems to me only one importance of the tattoos, for they should also be addressed via their movement. As Cady exercises, he raises and lowers his body in a rhythmic controlled action that animates the scales of truth and justice tattooed on his back. Combined, the tattoos and male body are more spectacle than text; we gaze at a body that displays both Cady’s current physical control (exercise) and past body-modificatory control (tattoos). Equally, the scales and the balanced movement suggest calm self-assuredness. Rather than undermine Stoddart’s conclusion that the tattoos ‘function both to reinforce the sadomasochistic associations carried by De Niro’s body and to make a spectacle out of it’ (1995, 201), an emphasis on how the tattoos are presented enhances the dynamic. The sadomasochism, both within the narrative and as an aspect of De Niro’s Method acting, is shown as measured and calmly achieved. Inserting the controlled body into our reading of the scene featuring the body search, we can achieve a new understanding, namely, Cady may have set himself up to be interrogated by the police to discredit Bowden (Nick Nolte). If Cady is in control of the event, then it is no surprise that the marks on his body, which he has also controlled, should be so visible.

Rather than appearance though, it is the doing of body modification, including the motivation, the experience, and the aftermath, which concerns me most. *The Pillow Book* (Peter Greenaway. Netherlands/France/UK, 1995), although detailing

the temporary painting of calligraphy on the skin,³ has a strong association with tattooing via its expression of the pleasure of inscribing the human body. Fusing the decoration of the flesh with sexual intimacy, Nagiko (Vivian Wu) first pursues lovers who will illustrate her skin, before finding gratification in using her lovers' bodies as canvases. The very transience of the designs prevents the resonance of tattoos, but the settings of Japan and Hong Kong, and the emphasis on ritualized adornment, equates the imagery with the dense Asian heritage of the tattooed body. In addition, the flaying of a dead lover's decorated skin to create the ultimate pillow book suggests a potential permanency of the decorated surface. This most private of body art exists in sharp contrast to that depicted in *Skin*, an episode of the television series *Tales of the Unexpected* (1980).⁴ In a graphic display of body modification as art, a tattooist (Derek Jacobi) has an artist paint a portrait on his back, before overlaying it with a tattoo. Later, when the artist is famous, the tattooist is tricked into going to a non-existent hotel; soon afterwards, a strange canvas depicting a portrait by the artist appears for sale.

In *The Illustrated Man* (Jack Smight, USA, 1969), Rod Steiger plays Carl, a man covered in tattoos, or skin illustrations, as he calls them. Ostensibly linking three separate stories, the illustrations mysteriously come alive for anyone who gazes at them, and reveal their story; in other words, they have a memory function. The film also touches on the issue of aestheticizing via body modification. In the flashback story of Carl acquiring the tattoos, he is initially reluctant, but is captivated by the mystical tattooist, Felicia (Claire Bloom), and becomes entranced by the reflection of his transformed body; when Carl thinks he will 'be a freak', Felicia reassures,

³ Writing on the skin and turning the body into art appears to be part of a Japanese tradition that includes the popular Buddhist legend Mimi-Nashi-Hoichi where a blind artist has his body covered in a holy spell to protect him. Angela Dalle Vacche (1996, 214-220) believes the legend may have influenced Kenji Mizoguchi's *Utamaro o meguru gonin no onna Five Women around Utamaro* (Japan, 1946) where a woodblock artist paints a woman's back, which is later tattooed.

⁴ Roald Dahl's story *Skin* was first published in the *New Yorker* in 1952.

‘You’ll be beautiful’ (figure 3.2).

Tattoos are also highly visible in the critically successful New Zealand film *Once Were Warriors* (Lee Tamahori, 1994). Its exploration of cultural identity brought a particular style of tattooing to the attention of the northern hemisphere. Associating the traditional Maori tattoo or *moko* with both cultural heritage and youth subculture, one scene shows Nig (Julian Arahanga) enduring a severe beating to be accepted into a gang before having a *moko* etched onto one side of his face. Although Nig sees this as empowering, modern tattoo parlours are linked, by location at least, to the sleaze of prostitution. Further, it is Nig’s younger brother Boogie (Taungaroa Emile) that is introduced to what is depicted as the more authentic Maori rites of the *haka* and the spirit of his ancestors. Nonetheless, *Once Were Warriors* utilizes the *moko* body modification as an important evocation of self-control. Where Nig’s *moko* is equated with his restraint, his abusive father’s lack of control is symbolized via his conglomeration of modern tattoos (a scorpion and barbed wire) and a more traditional tattooed armband.⁵

Whilst these recent films implicitly acknowledge the rising interest in tattoos, and their increased visibility, the cultural significance of their relationship to the control of the human body has remained on the periphery or been ignored. The films have treated the tattoos as functional, both within the narrative (clues) and as part of the mode of narration (character defining attributes). Only *The Pillow Book*, which is not strictly about tattoos, is interested in the pleasures of controlling the body image. One film that concentrates on the act of control is Bob Brook’s *Tattoo* (1981), but far from examining the pleasurable liberation of the control, it deploys it as sadistic domination.

⁵ Nig’s *moko* prompts a feeling of humanity in a manner similar to the facial tattoos of Baines (Harvey Keitel) in another Australasian film, *The Piano* (Jane Campion, Australia, 1993). It is noticeable that his decoration is juxtaposed with the plainness of the unadorned, strait-laced Stewart (Sam Neill), who performs his own act of body modification by brutally hacking off Ada’s (Holly Hunter) finger.



Figure 3.2 Captivated by the image of tattoos in *The Illustrated Man*

As its title suggests, *Tattoo* has a particular body modification as its narrative concern. Meeting Maddy (Maud Adams) on a fashion shoot, tattooist Karl Kinsky (Bruce Dern) becomes so obsessed by the model that he kidnaps her and tattoos most of her body. The narrative is essentially a revision of John Fowles's novel of 1963, *The Collector*, which had already been made into a film under that title (William Wyler, USA/UK, 1965), and similarly portrays a man holding a woman captive in the belief she will come to love him. What differentiates *Tattoo* is that the act of control is no longer centred on captivity, but has been relocated onto body modification and the regulation of body image. Raising questions about the sexual liberation of women, the film places tattoos within the sleazy world of pornography and prostitution, but grounded in a tradition that is simultaneously linked to freedom and conservatism.

The opening sequence summarizes the crystallization of cultural attitudes towards tattoos. Dressed in an American serviceman's uniform, Karl towers over a surging crowd of Japanese men and women. A reverse shot shows the object of his

gaze to be tattooed men in loincloths parading from a temple. As a fixated Karl photographs the scene, a collection of intercut shots show straining tattooed arms, backs, buttocks and legs in medium shot and close-up (figure 3.3). Linked by dissolves, the sequence draws our attention not to the detail of the tattoos but their movements as their owners gyrate. The upshot is twofold. Firstly, the inscribed figures and dragons are imbued with vitality. Secondly, we notice we are doing something uncommon in Hollywood cinema: marvelling at the beauty of the male flesh. Thus, we do not see the art of the tattoo but the art of the tattooed body.

In contrast to the rigid and sartorially uniformed Karl, the traditional Japanese pseudo-clothing of tattooed vests, suits and pants express individuality and freedom. The temple, the procession, and the subsequent shot of Karl, in front of Japanese screens, and being tattooed in the time-honoured way (manually putting ink under the skin with a sharp instrument), manifest a conservatism of Japanese society. Furthermore, the Japanese-style tattoo is, as Susan Benson notes in her study of tattooing, invested ‘with the refined aesthetic of an “ancient civilization”’ (2000, 242). The narrative too appears indebted to Japan by partly replicating Junichiro Tanizaki’s story ‘The Tattooer’ (1963a), which also features a tattooist who drugs a woman and tattoos her body. However, the cinematic dissolve from Karl’s unfinished tattooed arm, with non-diegetic Japanese music, to the same angle of the now coloured-in tattoo, accompanied by the diegetic sound of an electric tattoo gun, breaks the sense of tradition, and drags the film into the neon-lit world of the seedy tattoo parlour. The clash of the two worlds is central to the film, and tattooing functions as the bridge, with particular sexual significance.

The limited motivation for Karl abducting and tattooing Maddy is found in the flashback voiceover sequence of a brutal father calling him a sissy, and a pseudo-psychoanalytic suggestion that the tattoo gun phallically compensates for his lack of



Figure 3.3 Male bodies as canvases in *Tattoo*

sexual prowess. The latter part of this reading is vocalized near the beginning of the film when two teenage prostitutes shout, 'Hey Rembrandt, how about sticking your needle where it counts?'⁶ It is no coincidence either that it is a tattoo gun that Maddy uses to kill Karl as he rapes her.

The tattoos reciprocally substitute for Maddy's sexual organs. When Karl forces Maddy to masturbate whilst he spies on her through a peephole, it is as an alternative to the tattooing he had prepared her for. Telling her to open her robe and touch herself, he orders her to 'Show me, show me'. In accord with cinematic censorship of the period, the camera has to do the opposite, and pans up Maddy's body showing her snaking tattoo. And although the shot includes Maddy's bare breasts, the voyeurism is displaced from Karl's view of Maddy's pudendum onto the audience's view of the tattooed torso. Furthermore, the film as a whole takes on the tone of soft-core porn, with tattooing interludes, with or without explicit nudity, resembling sex scenes displayed for voyeuristic pleasure.⁷

⁶ Later in a film the comparison is again made when a character describes Karl's work as 'a little bit of needle, a little bit of dick'.

⁷ The sense of the erotic and tattoos, although not a cinematic commonplace, does exist elsewhere. *Emmanuelle 2/Emmanuelle II, l'anti-vierge* (Francis Giacobetti, France, 1975) depicts the central protagonist (Sylvia Kristel) being attracted to, and then having sex with, a man covered in tattoos of

At the end of *Tattoo*, Maddy's fully tattooed body is climactically revealed. Her body is shot using an assortment of slow pans and tilts, linked by dissolves, which create a fetishistic display of the tattoos. For the first time in the film, we see the body modifications in prolonged close-up, and Maddy correspondingly reacts to them differently, inspecting them with curiosity. Her digression from the established pattern of disgust is contrived, and is distorted further by her being so excited by Karl's revelation of his own tattoos that she initially enjoys being raped by him. Without any motivation, the spectator's voyeuristic pleasure of seeing the refigurement has been transposed onto Maddy as sexual excitement. Almost certainly, this in some measure explains the misogynistic tone of the film in spite of Maddy culminating the scene by killing Karl. Unlike Tanizaki's story, where the woman eventually embraces her transformation ('I can bear anything for the sake of beauty' (1963a, 169))⁸ and has a tattoo (a black widow spider) that appears to bring out what she considers to be her true sadistic self ('All my old fears have been swept away – and you are my first victim!' (1963a, 169)), Maddy is disempowered by her acceptance of the tattoos. But I would argue there is another factor to the misogyny, one predicated on the type of control exerted in the film.

In *The Collector*, a woman is held captive, and until her death near the end of the film, there is a sense that she might escape and somehow put the ordeal behind her. Unlike this earlier film, from the moment of Maddy's first tattoo, she cannot free herself, for a permanently altered body can never be escaped; consequently, there is a

Japanese women. And more potently, in terms of suggesting a fusion of sensuality and the experience of undergoing body modification as an exquisite pain, we watch Emmanuelle ecstatically masturbating as acupuncture needles are shown piercing her enraptured face, having previously been used to pierce her breasts.

⁸ Mascia-Lees and Sharpe offer a different reading of Tanizaki's story: 'To the male artist her tattoo is not a mutilation, but a concretization of the hidden message of her body: for him it reveals her true nature as evil and destructive to men. But the woman experiences herself as horribly transfigured' (1992b, 148). Such a divergent reading I find difficult to achieve without contriving it, especially when Tanizaki states: 'A song of triumph was ringing in her ears' (1963a, 169).

greater intensity of control. It is the permanency of tattoos that appeals to people that choose them (Curry 1993, 70-73; Benson 2000, 249-251), hence Karl states, 'to me things must last'. But respectively, the imposition of tattoos is made all the more horrendous by their longevity.⁹ Of course, in reality, the psychological trauma of captivation creates a legacy in its own right that may be impossible to bear. But in a visual medium, and where both films do not show the aftermath, the immediacy of the physical change is more comprehensible for the spectator. The misogyny therefore emanates from the film's narrative focus on a man refiguring a female body by force.

Karl is evidently a 'control freak': he demands Maddy tell him and not the waiter what she wants to drink so he can order it, and he shows a particular interest in mastering the female body. We see Karl exert his control in a dislocated manner when he rewatches the video of Maddy that he refuses to return to the fashion agency, but also, more explicitly, at the peepshow, where he commands the woman not to do anything until he tells her to. In both scenes, the image of the woman is mediated via glass, reinforcing the concept of a two-dimensional image that is surface rather than substance.¹⁰ The impression of façade or skin is enhanced by the subsidiary comments in the film about Aphrodite beauty products, and twin children being born where one is white and the other is black. The implication is the importance of exteriors in defining oneself, and the ability (or lack of it) to control that image.

Symbolically, the tattoos are about controlling Maddy. Karl desires an old-

⁹ In contrast, it is stressed before the fashion shoot that Karl is only to paint the models with designs, not actually tattoo them. The erotic appeal of the refigurement is still noted, with Maddy's boyfriend suggesting she does not wash afterwards, but should 'save it for tonight'.

¹⁰ The peepshow booth is used very differently to that in *Paris, Texas* (Wim Wenders, West Germany/France/UK, 1984). In that film, the image Travis (Harry Dean Stanton) has of his ex-wife (Nastassja Kinski) is symbolically exposed as false via the camera revealing her side of the booth to be a constructed set, and through their inability to fully glimpse each other in the dimmed light.

fashioned relationship with Maddy, where the man pays, protects and dominates the woman: a partnership founded on a world prior to female sexual liberation. Maddy's broad-minded and casual attitude towards sex disgusts and frightens Karl by undermining his patriarchal status, and his response reflects a societal concern of the 1970s, that female sexual freedom was linked to all manner of perceived social ills (including divorce and male impotence). Karl clearly identifies tattoos, or the mark as he refers to them, as being a sign of rejecting such mores: women who have tattoos 'are ready to be identified; ready to belong'. The attitude that the marked (tattooed, pierced, branded) body denotes belonging, although expressed by some BDSMers, is not normally gendered, and belies the beliefs more generally associated with tattoos in Western society, such as being signs of independence, a free spirit and 'act[ing] less as markers of group identification, and more as expressions of the self' (Sweetman 1999b, 66).

The reason *Tattoo* makes such a misreading is perhaps because of the timing of the film: it came prior to the increased trend for tattoos, which Sweetman's survey pinpoints as having 'accelerated since the mid- to late-1980s' (1999b, 51). *Tattoo* therefore predates the culturally negotiated and espoused meanings founded on consent and the body as a personal project to be modified. Having said that, the Japanese film *Sekka Tomurai Zashi/Irezumi/Spirit of Tattoo* (Yoichi Takabayashi, Japan, 1982), coming only one year after *Tattoo*, does seem slightly more aware of these reasons in its exploration of sexual obsession and decorating the body. In the film, Arkane (Masayo Utsunomiya), a young lover of a married man, agrees to be tattooed because she wishes to satisfy his fetish for tattooed women. That once again rape is linked to tattooing makes the film deeply troubling, for the renowned tattooist chosen to create the design can only work if the woman is simultaneously having sex to bring the tattoos alive. That Arkane falls in love with her enforced partner, the

tattooist's son. also seems to condone the rape, but the unease is modified by a transformation in her demeanour similar to that undergone by the woman in Tanizaki's story. Further, Arkane chooses to return to be tattooed rather than is forced, and it is her story not the tattooist's that we follow. Thus, rather than coercive control, the focus is on her choices, including undertaking the culturally taboo tattooing.

Maddy is denied the same proactiveness, and the control exerted over her is quantifiable and lasting, as well as symbolic. In practical terms, Maddy's modelling career (especially in the 1980s) would be greatly limited, if not destroyed, because her body would no longer conform to accepted Westernized images of beauty. As Mascia-Lees and Sharpe note, the tattooing therefore controls both her sexual freedom by labelling her as his, but also her financial independence for she can 'no longer use her body as a medium of exchange' (1992b, 153). There is a more personal factor too. On seeing her tattoos for the first time, Maddy spits on her hand and tries to rub the mark off (figure 3.4).¹¹ Realizing the permanency, she cries, with some hope of contradiction, 'This shit ain't never gonna come off, is it?' The choice of noun defines the abject nature of the transformation of her appearance, and the smashing of the mirror containing her reflection materializes her rejection of her new image. The scale of her despondency is developed via her pleading, 'Why didn't you just kill me?' To change someone's body image against his or her will is evidently a massive demonstration of control, and a supremely distressing and unsettling feat. Thus, *Tattoo*, rather than exploring body modification as a positive pursuit, utilizes its aesthetics as a location for mutilation and oppression. It is as if it is too uncomfortable to recognize such pleasures of the flesh.

¹¹ The relationship of body modification to self-image is vital, and it is therefore noteworthy that the images from *Memento* (figure 3.1), *The Illustrated Man* (figure 3.2), and *Tattoo* (figure 3.4) feature the protagonist in front of a mirror, thus enabling the spectator to see the change, and the subject reacting to the change.



Figure 3.4 Showing abject disgust at coercive body modification in *Tattoo*

It is valuable to note it is body image that is at stake and not pain. My assertion is apparent when we recognize the film's refusal to show any redness or wadding to imply soreness of the tattoos. A tattooee in the film may state 'if it don't hurt a little it ain't no fun', but there is no hard evidence of it. When Maddy is shown awakening for the second time, and seeing her now coloured and emboldened tattoos, she shows her loathing by her involuntary vomiting. The sight of her body now repels her. But the spectacle of the controlled body is founded upon the visualized notion of the control, in other words, the more tattoos, the greater the control. This is why Maddy's fully tattooed body is withheld until the closure. Unlike Western society where the tattoo has been appropriated by many groups 'to signify unconstraint' (Curry 1993, 72), the very opposite is true here. The unveiled Maddy retains the concept of beauty though, both through the designs, and earlier comparisons of Karl's work to that of Rembrandt and being explicitly described as 'art' by the fashion director. Yet, although referencing the creativity and elegance of the tattoos, and evoking the opening scene of the film via Maddy and Karl's tattoos coming 'alive' as he rapes her, the controlled body, rather than beauty, informs the reading of

this most explicit occurrence of tattooing in Hollywood cinema.

Going Beyond the Surface

Body modification is much more than tattoos though. Some of the most popular techniques are piercings, which can range from the culturally acceptable and publicly visible ear and navel jewellery through to the more private genital piercings that offer aesthetic and potentially physical benefits. Of course, piercings offer limited opportunities for films: a small hole is not very exciting visually, and is only semi-permanent, so can heal up. Thus, they are the very opposite of the properties drawn upon in *Tattoo*. Even multiple piercings are not cinematic, especially as the act of piercing, unlike tattooing, is comparatively quick and painless. The relative novelty and hence voyeurism offered by genital piercing is also denied because of censorship issues. Consequently, piercing is a form of body alteration that does not feature prominently in film.

What does offer opportunities to cinema, but has still not been exploited in many films, is the performed rituals involved with piercing the skin, and in particular, the use of the piercings as points for suspension and load bearing. Two recent fiction films have tapped into the spectacle of the pierced body within a Modern Primitive mindset: *The Cell* (Tarsem Singh, USA/Germany, 2000) and *Strangeland*. Both films significantly overlap the themes of the other chapters of my thesis. The former features a serial killer who plays mind games with an investigator, whilst the film uses BDSM iconography (pony girl, bondage collars etc.) fused with artistic references to depict the killer's murderous intent. The latter film has a serial kidnapper (and killer) called Captain Howdy, who again torments his pursuer, and subjects his victims to enforced non-mainstream body modifications.

The Cell is of lesser interest in the context of this chapter, for it offers limited

examples of body alterations. Nonetheless, the killer is largely defined by his bizarre ritual: he suspends himself via metal rings embedded into the skin on his back, whilst the bleached body of his victim lies beneath him; his suffering therefore serves to reflect and reinforce hers (figure 3.5). The metal hoops are shown in close up as they strain to tear through the skin, and confirm a control over his body as well as that of his victim. The suspension reworks the spiritual act of Indian Sadhus hanging from flesh hooks. Fakir Musafar, a central figure in establishing Modern Primitive beliefs, has copied the rituals (figure 3.6), and more recently, it has become a familiar sight in performance art, for example, John Kamikaze suspended himself from meat hooks in Selfridges's shop window in London in May 2003. Like Kamikaze, *The Cell* is more concerned with the body modification as spectacle than in investing it with any great meaning. In contrast, *Strangeland* is intent on stating the relevance of controlling the body through piercings and pain.

Fakir Musafar has stated that 'if society won't give them [people] a rite of passage, they'll invent one!' (in Vale and Juno 1989a, 11). The central character in *Strangeland* espouses his sentiment. Taking his inspiration from Vale and Juno's influential book *Modern Primitives: An Investigation of Contemporary Adornment & Ritual* (1989b), Captain Howdy recites phrases such as 'I'm interested in heightening people's awareness: altering states through primitive rituals', and 'The act of slow piercing is a transcendent, spiritual event; there is no pain just sensation.'¹² However, rather than exploring the personal pleasures of controlling the body image and sensorium via Modern Primitive body modification techniques, *Strangeland* merely utilizes piercings to signify pain and coercive control. As with *Tattoo*, marking another's body is the ultimate sign of mastery. Consequently, as in the majority of

¹² The second sentence of the epigraph to this chapter, which is also spoken by Captain Howdy in the film, is a slightly abridged version of a statement made by Fakir Musafar in the book. Speaking about the need for a rite of passage, Musafar states, 'It must be physical, it must be painful, it must be bloody, and it should leave a mark' (in Vale and Juno 1989a, 11).

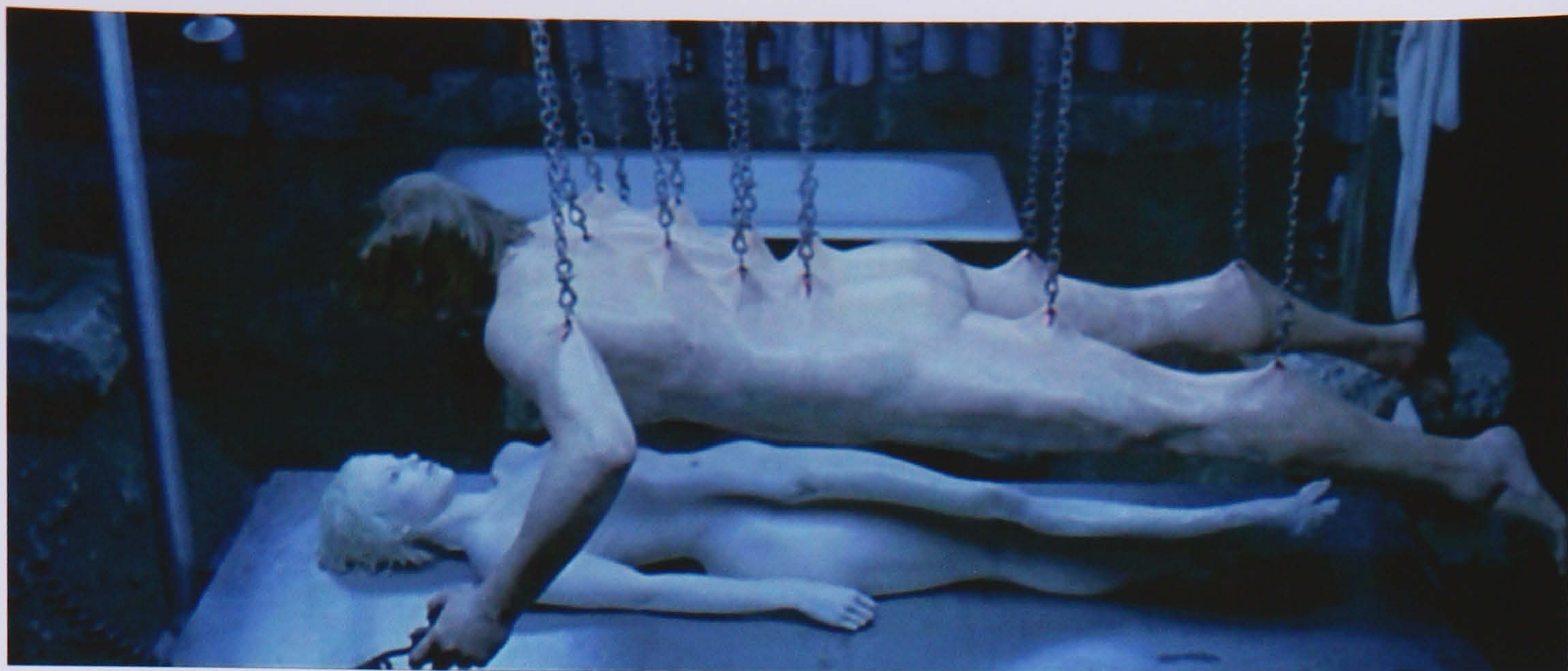


Figure 3.5 Body modification reflecting the suffering of the serial killer's victim in *The Cell*



Figure 3.6 Fakir Musafar hangs from flesh hooks (*Modern Primitives: An Investigation of Contemporary Adornment & Ritual* by Juno and Vale (1989b))

depictions of BDSM, body modification is appropriated as a visual trope for sadism (in spite of Captain Howdy saying, 'I find sadists to be rather dull').

Although Captain Howdy undergoes O-Kee-Pa (hanging from hooks through his pectoral flesh) in an attempt to achieve the same spiritual enlightenment as the Shaman (figures 3.7 and 3.8), and a minor character explicitly champions being a



Figure 3.7 Captain Howdy undergoes O-Kee-Pa in *Strangeland*



Figure 3.8 Fakir Musafar undergoes O-Kee-Pa (*Modern Primitives: An Investigation of Contemporary Adornment & Ritual* by Juno and Vale (1989b))

Modern Primitive and the pleasure of ‘power over our own bodies’, the majority of the film is about body alteration used as torture. Thus, a man is forcibly given an ampallang (a horizontal bar through the glans of the penis), a captive woman endures a Kavandi-bearing ceremony (a frame of spears stuck into the flesh), and another man has flesh hooks put through his skin. And throughout the film, all his prisoners have their mouths sewn up. With such depictions clearly clashing with the sentiments of being a Modern Primitive, where marking the body is done for personal reasons, for example, self-awareness and asserting independence, body modification loses its masochistic fusing of pleasure and pain, and participants are defined as deviant. Consequently, the world of the Modern Primitive is seen as incomprehensible, and so no members of the community are even asked if they know who Captain Howdy is, although he could easily be identified by his highly distinctive septum piercing. The impression *Strangeland* therefore leaves you with is of body piercing as performative and domineering, rather than sensually and consensually inscriptive. However, for the devotee of such pursuits, there remains the pleasure of seeing one of the few cinematic depictions of such acts of body modification.

Cinema has expressed a greater interest in more extreme forms of body modification though. There is a longstanding tradition of showing the disfigured body, notably the process of reversing it, as well as achieving it. I must reiterate though that I am only focusing on films that utilize the refigured body because of its ability to summon themes of domination and sensual control. Such refigurement of the human body may seem quite incongruous with body modification practices such as piercing and corseting, but when one considers chosen scarification and branding, the distinction no longer seems to apply.

Although a number of films, especially in the period up to the late 1930s, featured a macabre concentration on people with physical disabilities, there are only

a few that can be deemed comparable to contemporary body modification practices. These films highlight unnecessary surgery and the creation of a new body image. It is productive to briefly note these antecedents of body modification cinema, but it is only in the last two decades that films have begun to suggest an aesthetic or sensual pleasure in an appearance that would normally be regarded as a deformity.

In the 1910s and 1920s, Lon Chaney Snr became renowned for playing physically deformed characters.¹³ In part, the notoriety arose from the circulating tales of the punishment he subjected his body to whilst performing his roles,¹⁴ consequently, Gary Morris has more recently called him a ‘cinematic supermasochist’ (1995). In 1927, Chaney starred in *The Unknown* (Tod Browning, USA). Bizarrely, Chaney’s character, Alonzo, is a circus knife-thrower with no arms, but what makes the film pertinent is that the narrative reveals he actually does have arms (the deceit enables him to hide from the police), yet he chooses to have them amputated.

Nanon (Joan Crawford), the woman Alonzo loves, refuses to be touched by a man, and Alonzo believes if he has no arms she will reciprocate his love. That Alonzo strangled Nanon’s father, with Nanon only witnessing that the assailant had two thumbs on one hand, further complicates the story. In effect, Alonzo chooses one type of deformity (no arms) over another (surplus digit), with the aim of making himself desirable. Refigurement to create an improved body image is evidently a narrative concern, although the voyeuristic pleasure for the audience is seeing Lon Chaney drink from a glass held in his feet.

¹³ In addition to Quasimodo and the Phantom of the opera, he was blind in *Treasure Island* (Maurice Tourneur, USA, 1920), a fake cripple in *The Miracle Man* (George Loane Tucker, USA, 1919), a paralytic in *The Blackbird* (Tod Browning, USA, 1926), a paraplegic in *West of Zanzibar* (Tod Browning, USA, 1928) and an amputee in *The Penalty* (Wallace Worsley, USA, 1920), amongst others.

¹⁴ These opinions were formed even though for some films Lon Chaney Snr did have a body double (see Mirsalis, 2000).

Tod Browning's most infamous film, *Freaks* (USA, 1932), also requires a mention. Set in a freak show, it features a cavalcade of actual freak-show performers, including John Eck (who had no body from the waist down), Randian, the Living Torso, and the armless Frances O'Connor. Not until the cult western *El Topo/The Mole* (Alejandro Jodorowsky, Mexico, 1970), and the martial arts films *Crippled Masters* (Joe Law, Hong Kong, [1984?]) and *Two Crippled Heroes* (Shia Yue, USA, 1983) would cinema again feature actual limbless characters so prominently. But *Freaks* is the only film of the four to articulate a spectacle around body modification: the beautiful trapeze artist, Cleopatra (Olga Baclanova), is mutilated into a legless feathered freak by the other performers for trying to poison her midget husband.¹⁵ As a retort to her calling the rest of the troupe 'freaks', the destruction of her body image is chosen as the site of greatest punishment. For all the shock of Cleopatra's changed appearance, the spectacle of the control is forever bound up in the image of the other members of the cast. Her suffering is therefore witnessed through their (perceived to be painful) disfigurement.

Facial disfigurement is a more common feature of Hollywood cinema. Based on Victor Hugo's novel *L'Homme Qui Rit* (1869), *The Man Who Laughs* (Paul Leni, USA, 1928) tells the story of a boy whose face has been deliberately disfigured into a rictus. The film appears to have influenced William Castle's *Mr Sardonicus* (USA, 1961), where the permanent grin is an unfortunate affliction caused by fright, and the narrative focus is on trying to remove it. Curing rather than creating is also the theme of *Johnny Handsome* (Walter Hill, USA, 1989). As opposed to *Mask* (Peter Bogdanovich, USA, 1985), which shows that disfigurement is no bar to being humane, *Johnny Handsome* proposes a physiognomic approach that aligns facial

¹⁵ The newly constructed human chicken freak looks remarkably similar to stills of a scene omitted from the final print of *West of Zanzibar*, which had Lon Chaney as half human and half duck.

deformity with murderous actions. The premise is that corrective surgery will prevent recidivism, but the narrative's depiction of the failure of this enterprise suggests deformity, rather than being a cause of crime, is a symptom of the propensity for it. The film's theme is therefore the need to look 'normal'.

None of the films mentioned so far in this section invest their narratives with a pleasure based on the visualized transformation, except in the form of revenge or punishment. The same attitude of coercion explains the severing of a finger in *The Piano*, and the equally graphic scene in Rob Reiner's film *Misery*, when Annie mercilessly hobbles the prone Paul Shelton by smashing his ankles with a sledgehammer. Both scenes most definitely employ body modification as graphic forms of control. Both are spectacular (albeit in different ways), yet they do not convey pleasure or purpose beyond an urge for practicality. To find the additional component that informs body modification in society as a whole, namely enjoying refigurement, we need to look elsewhere.¹⁶

Perhaps the most vivid examples are found not in Hollywood, but in the New York-based Cinema of Transgression. Blending performance art, hard-core pornography and direct cinema, filmmakers such as Nick Zedd and Richard Kern produced a range of films that deal with images of sadism, masochism, gender roles and individuality. A culturally and cinematically influential movement, three films are of specific relevance to the following discussion of *Boxing Helena* and *Crash*.

Richard Kern's *Pierce* (USA, 1986) is a documentary showing his girlfriend Audrey Rose having her nipples pierced. Detailing a subject now familiar from countless television documentaries, the film came after *Robert Having His Nipple Pierced* (Sandy Daley, USA, 1968), which featured Robert Mapplethorpe

¹⁶ Although Annie in *Misery* says immediately after smashing Paul's ankles that she loves him, the sentiment is in no way related to her previous action.

undergoing a similar bejewelling. Thus, Kern's film continued the process of mainstreaming the once very marginal pursuit, and may indicate a specific shift in the mid-1980s from the videos of Modern Primitives and body modification conventions,¹⁷ towards films made by dedicated filmmakers, however marginal and underground. Further, by these subcultural filmmakers showing an interest in recording body modification, it was almost inevitable that mainstream cinema would eventually embrace some depictions too.

More extreme than *Pierce* is Kern's later documentary *The Sewing Circle* (USA, 1992). Featuring Kembra Pfahler, the film graphically depicts the temporary body modification of sewing up her vagina. Clearly a chosen and collaborative act with two other women, the film heightens the sense of body modification being an exquisite pain, and makes a dramatic spectacle of the sexualized controlled body.¹⁸

The final film that seems particularly relevant to the notion of beauty and disfigurement is Nick Zedd's *War is Menstrual Envy* (USA, 1992).¹⁹ In one scene, Annie Sprinkle, notorious pro-porn feminist sex educator and performer, kisses and licks the burn-scarred body of a man dressed in a soldier's uniform. Nick Zedd describes how he used an actual burns victim, whose skin he shows in close-up, because 'I felt that he was both beautiful and ugly' (in Sargeant 1995, 69). The amalgamation of disfigurement and change of perspective (close-up rather than long

¹⁷ For example *Signatures of the Soul* (Geoff Steven, New Zealand, 1984), Fakir Musafar's Sun Dance ritual in *Dances Sacred and Profane* (Dan Jury and Mark Jury, USA, 1985) and Charles Gatewood's *Tattoo, San Francisco* (USA, [1988?]). We should also note that Richard Harris had earlier provided a fake and inaccurate form of Sun Dance in *A Man Called Horse* (Elliott Silverstein, USA, 1970).

¹⁸ Similar scenes have apparently been depicted in the hard-core pornographic films *Finally Punished* (no details available) and *Verfickt und Zugenäht* (Harry S Morgan, West Germany, 1997). Due to the nature of these films, and current UK censorship laws, it has not been possible to substantiate this, and yet, Channel 4 showed a clip of *The Sewing Circle* in the television programme *Disinfo Nation* (2001). Such a seemingly contradictory stance might indicate a polarization of the categories of documentary and fiction: the sequence broadcast by Channel 4 was framed within an informative, documentary aesthetic, whilst the films are associated with fictional entertainment. Thus, it appears that extreme body modification can be shown if it informs, but not if it entertains, by stressing its pleasures.

¹⁹ The influence of the Cinema of Transgression (or at least Nick Zedd) can be noted by Quentin Tarantino naming the policeman in *Pulp Fiction* (USA, 1994) after the director, and including a line that references the fake obituary published about Zedd (Bliznick 1996).

shot) challenges our notions of beauty and what types of textured skin are erotic.

Less graphically, but more notoriously, *Boxing Helena* is a Hollywood film from 1993 that approaches these same themes of beauty, perspective and body alteration. In spite of the film's numerous flaws,²⁰ *Boxing Helena* has an intriguing narrative, for it aestheticizes the suffering of amputation by depicting a man creating a living equivalent of the Venus de Milo (anonymous, circa 100 BC). Raising the thorny issue of whether the refigured body is beautiful, the film is a prominent reformulation of body modification in mainstream cinema.

Replicating a characterization familiar from *Tattoo*, Dr Nick Cavanaugh (Julian Sands) is revealed to be sexually inadequate (premature ejaculation) and have an obsessive foible (he continually changes his shirt),²¹ whilst his actions are parcelled into a pseudo-psychoanalytic explanation of a neglectful father and a tormenting mother whom he watched in a primal scene. Both films evidently correspond to Victoria Pitts (1999) discovering that body modification is pathologized in the media. In the case of *Boxing Helena*, the act of self-definition through body modification is not only inaccurately transposed onto another's body, but is also, in effect, inverted from an expression of agency into a sign of psychologically abnormal compunction. Nick's obsession with Helena (Sherilyn Fenn), a previous one-night stand, apparently leads him to hold her captive and perform successive double amputations of her limbs. Although the end of the film exposes the surgery and imprisonment to be a dream, the closure fails to undercut what has gone before; the boxing of Helena, with body modification seen as pathologically deviant, remain the abiding themes of the film.

²⁰ Reviews of *Boxing Helena* are frequently prefaced by comments describing the withdrawal of both Madonna and Kim Basinger from playing the lead role, with the damning conclusion that the compensation Ms Basinger was obliged to pay for her actions was money well spent (Kempley 1993; Lipman 1993).

²¹ In *Tattoo*, Karl's minor tick is that he will only hold a public telephone with a cloth.

As with *Tattoo*, *Boxing Helena* reworks the subject matter of *The Collector*, but the *raison d'être* is not control by containment as in the latter, nor regulation by mutilation, it is control via codes of beauty. Thus, Jennifer Chambers Lynch, who both directed and wrote the screenplay, loads the film with images and sounds of the classically beautiful. The house Nick holds Helena captive in is a mass of Doric and Ionic columns, with strategically placed urns evoking the grandeur of ancient civilizations. Filtered into the classical milieu are references to fine art via calling cards featuring Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (circa 1485) and a plethora of statues, including the constantly referred to Venus de Milo-esque figure. Popular classical music also features prominently, including excerpts from Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 3, Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 25, and Puccini's *Nessun Dorma* and *La Bohème*. The aural and visual notoriety of these sights and sounds allows their mere presence to evoke classical concepts of beauty. The inference is abundantly clear: Nick has beautiful things in his home and Helena is to become one of them. The issue is whether she is still beautiful when reduced, quite literally, into a sedentary object. In tandem, questions regarding the objectification of women are brought to the fore.

Helena first comes face-to-face with the marble effigy that will inspire her refigurement when Nick lures her to his home by stealing her address book. As she enters a room, the camera represents her point of view, and tracks in on a Venus de Milo-esque statue.²² An oblique reverse shot shows Helena standing before it, captivated by its beauty. A two-shot that follows shows the goddess of love and beauty dispassionately returning Helena's gaze, whilst we, as audience members, objectify the pair (figure 3.9). Even without any knowledge of her fate, we can see

²² Although blatantly resembling the Grecian art object, it is noteworthy that it has its lower legs missing, thus creating a greater similarity to the boxed Helena.



Figure 3.9 Statuesque beauty in *Boxing Helena*

Helena as a potential simulacrum via her short-sleeved white dress that corresponds to the marble form in front of her.²³

In addition to beauty, the scene highlights Nick's need for control. Having used the address book as bait, he initially denies having it, before revealing it on a silver salver from under a lid. The remainder of the film reasserts the theme of control. Symbolically, the fretwork on the main door and windows echo a harem, and after Helena's legs have been amputated, we have successive shots of a bird in a cage and a cutting of a rose. Nick also torments Helena by offering her the telephone to call for help, but then discloses he has disconnected it. Later, after performing the surgical removal of Helena's arms, Nick is seen feeding her, giving her a drink and removing an eyelash from her face. However, positions of control oscillate. Helena torments Nick about his inability to give her an orgasm, and she instructs him on how to sexually fulfil a woman, before objectifying him as he puts her advice into practice. Furthermore, she orders Nick never to leave her alone and states, 'You

²³ Peter Greenaway's *A Zed and Two Noughts* (UK/Netherlands, 1985) had previously made the explicit link between the statue and a female amputee by characters referring to a woman with no legs as Venus de Milo. The Japanese film *Moju/Blind Beast* (Yasuzo Masumura, 1969) is closer to the essence of *Boxing Helena* though, with an artist eventually severing both arms and both legs of a captive woman, his action prompting the reciprocal destruction of the statue he had made of her.

think you can't be a man without me.'

Nick's control is primary though, and it is focused on his ability to dictate Helena's body. As with *Tattoo*, the representational image is linked to it: Nick watches (and therefore controls) a video of Helena cavorting in the fountain before being a captive, and he pores over glamour photographs of her when she had all her limbs. But, of course, it is her physical form that is most dominated. When we witness the boxed Helena on the table surrounded by flowers, Nick has quite literally put this beauty on a pedestal. For me, the most important question this image demands answered is whether Helena is still beautiful.²⁴ Nick categorically declares she is, but notes his remarks run contrary to accepted sentiments by stating, 'I know it's hard, but you do look beautiful today.' For the audience, the altar-inspired set establishes the newly modelled Helena as a living icon. Positioned on a cardinal red cushion with gold braiding, and set on a wooden throne surrounded by white flowers, Helena is a deity of deformity: a symbol deemed worthy of reverence (figure 3.10).

Helena's beauty could be regarded as conforming to the uncritical response that allows the portrait of a beautiful person to be defined as a beautiful portrait. In other words, as Helena is beautiful, it does not matter how Nick has recreated her. However, our knowledge of a before and an after, stresses Nick as an artist. Furthermore, Helena has been constructed both physically and with regard to her representation. Denied limbs, the resulting stasis means her beauty must be pictorial rather than dramatic or performative: she is a work of art. What is more, in accordance with a traditional perspective of art, she shows no sense of effort in

²⁴ I should stress that the emphasis on still being beautiful is founded on the textual construction that Helena was beautiful before being boxed. Her beauty is not only related to Nick's perception, but that of other men in the narrative, the camera, and implicitly the audience, and was established through her performed displays of her body in the fountain and in her bedroom for her lover, Ray (Bill Paxton), with Nick voyeuristically spying from outside.



Figure 3.10 Helena as a deity of deformity in *Boxing Helena*

creating the art.²⁵ Helena's lack of involvement therefore puts further weight on Nick as artistic creator of her image, in spite of her attractive appearance existing before his intervention.

Like the Venus de Milo-esque statue, Helena is placed to be stared at. But whereas the statue is a manmade beauty that is disfigured, Helena is a disfigured beauty that has been manmade. Are both, therefore, beautiful in the same manner? Is the original Venus de Milo a beautiful object only in spite of its defects, or does the contrast of traditional deformity and classical beauty allow the magnificence to stand in greater relief?

It seems pertinent to note that two photographers, George Dureau and Joel-Peter Witkin, have explored this very complex relationship of deformity and beauty via allusions to classical imagery. Dureau's work has frequently depicted male nudes, including those with disabilities, posed alongside plinths and columns. Edward Lucie-Smith has attested that Dureau's photographs speak to the observer in terms of

²⁵ It may sound like a contrived way of saying an art work is inanimate, but rather I am stressing the widespread conception of beauty (one that is even applied to women), that no effort must be declared by the beauty, although we may be fully aware that great effort must have been exerted to achieve the beauty. It is perhaps best described as grace in women, but there is no such category in art, although there remains a clear distinction between the artist (effort) and the created work (beauty).

‘how their [the models’] deformities have made a positive contribution to their development as people’ (in Dureau 1985, 10). In stark contrast, Helena screams: ‘How can I ever look at myself and think of myself as worthwhile, worth something?’ Rather than projecting identity as in Dureau’s photographs, Helena’s altered form represents a destruction of identity. A reading along these lines could enlighten us as to why Martin F. Norden, in his study of disability in films, finds *Boxing Helena* ‘pivots on a premise that ranks as one of the most repellent in movie history’ (1994, 311). But the underlying sexual tone of *Boxing Helena*, in conjunction with the refigurement, might also be to blame for the feelings of distaste.

George Dureau’s work directly addresses a tension between eroticism and revulsion via its explicit use of nudes. Joel-Peter Witkin has also sometimes used nudes in his photographic fusion of freak shows and crazed still lifes. In a range of images he has depicted dwarfs, hermaphrodites, obese people and amputees amidst fetishistic regalia such as corsets, ropes and masks, but staged them against backgrounds that reference pastoral scenes or specific works of art (figure 3.11). What should be a juxtaposition of accepted beauty with traditional images of ugliness and deformity is in truth a fascinatingly different form of elegance with the added *frisson* of sexuality. Edward Lucie-Smith quite rightly says of Dureau’s portfolio that ‘the photographs acknowledge that deformity has its own allure, and thus involve a direct confrontation with a very uncomfortable area of human psychology’ (in Dureau 1985, 10). The exact sentiment could be applied even more ardently to Witkin’s photographs.

The boxed Helena seems somewhat adrift from a similar interpretation though. The fault, if it can be called that, is the retention of her pretty prettiness, with not a hint of raggedness that scarring, redness or even a bandage would bring. And yet, her emphatic limblessness is her defining quality. The additional aspect Helena has is a



Figure 3.11 *Woman in the Blue Hat* (1985) by Joel-Peter Witkin

mystery about her deformity, for no damage is on display. The desire to see and know is a very powerful allure. Leslie Fiedler has commented that:

abnormality arouses in some 'normal' beholders a temptation to go beyond looking to *knowing* in the full carnal sense the ultimate other. That desire is itself felt as freaky, however, since it implies not only a longing for degradation but a dream of breaching the last taboo against miscegenation. (In Norden 1994, 316)

It has been suggested that *Boxing Helena* shares this fascination but dare not show it; instead, it masks the attraction of the different body behind issues of male domination and sexual inadequacy. In an essay entitled 'Taking the Lid Off Helena', an author known only as 'J' has argued that:

The real story is of a surgeon devotee mutilating a woman, not in pursuit of power, but simply to convert her body into a form that was even more sexually desirable, the gain in power being merely a contingent effect of the mutilation. (J. 2001a)

The essay is part of a website entitled *OverGround* which is described as:

dedicated to providing support and information for those of us, Devotees and Wannabes, who are attracted to others with physical disabilities, mainly amputees, and for the people to whom we are attracted. (J. 2001b)

Noting its stake in the subject, it is not surprising to find this source advancing the thought that Nick is a devotee, or to put it another way, experiences acrotomophilia, that is, someone who is sexually aroused by an amputee. Although not a frequently discussed fetish, it has been noted alongside apotemnophilia (being sexually excited by the fantasy or actuality of being an amputee), and recently, various media have begun to explore them. In the United Kingdom, within the space of fourteen months the BBC broadcast 'Out on a Limb/Complete Obsession: Body Dysmorphia' (2000) which was part of the *Horizon* series, and documented the desire to have a limb amputated; *Bizarre* magazine ran a feature entitled 'Stumped!' about apotemnophilia and acrotomophilia (Griffiths 2001, 70-74) alongside articles on tattooing and Ron Athey's performance art; and *Freak Out*, a Channel 4 series about disabilities, featured animation films portraying a pretender (someone who masquerades as an amputee), devotees and amputees (2000). The latter was modelled on, and named after, a web-based story called 'The Adventures of Beverlee', which was created by Kim Barreda, a double amputee. The stories humorously chronicle the pleasures and magnetism of amputation.²⁶

These circulating debates are taking place after, and perhaps in the light of, *Boxing Helena*, and share a common conception of extreme body modification. But can we truly suggest Nick is established in the narrative as a devotee? Does he see Helena as more pleasing after her amputations? Unlike Ray (Helena's lover), who cries 'She was beautiful' but thinks she is now a 'freak', Nick is adamant that the

²⁶ The original story on the World Wide Web ran into trouble for using Barbie dolls for its characters, a decision prompted by Barbie's manufacturer, Mattel, releasing a wheelchair-based figure called 'Share a Smile Becky' in 1997. The problem was that the wheelchair was too big to fit into Barbie's accessory products such as her car and her house: an oversight that acts as a telling statement about the treatment of people with disabilities in the broader public arena.

boxed version 'is beautiful'. It is also noteworthy that alongside the staging of Helena as a venerable icon, Nick looks over to her when he has sex with his fantasy lover, perhaps suggesting his need to imagine Helena for his sexual satisfaction. But to assert these details as defining characteristics of the narrative would be overly deterministic. The text has enough space to permit a devotee reading, but only via the assumption that it was too taboo to be mentioned. Acrotomophilia exists merely as a ripple not an undercurrent; the text seems content examining the control of the body via appearance, and challenging expectations of beauty. The film asks if Helena remains an attractive sexual being, and the answer, at least for Nick, is yes, but the removal of her limbs has not made her sexuality grow in stature.

Like Nick's décor, the film's interpretations of sexuality and beauty are classical. Body modification is a means to an end; there is no pleasure in the act of refigurement itself or even its results. Helena is an aestheticized spectacle of the controlled body, but one where any pleasure in pain, or even sensation, is lost. Our interest is derived from Nick's physical domination and Helena's sexual domination, but mostly through our reaction to questions of Helena's status as a beauty and her comparison with notions of art. As such, *Boxing Helena* chiefly avoids the issue of gratification in body modification. In mainstream American cinema, it is only through the film *Crash* that the pleasures of extreme body refigurement, in the context of socially prevalent forms of body modification, have expressly been spoken.

Scars and Cars

David Cronenberg's *Crash*, a Canadian film, but part of what has been called 'greater Hollywood' (Smith 1997, 14), avoids the sadistic impulses that tarnish *Boxing Helena* and *Tattoo*, and exploits and explores some of the pleasures of

participating in consensual body modification. Avoiding the essentialist approach of Modern Primitives and their search for 'authentic' rituals. *Crash* utilizes a symbol of Western excess, the motorcar, to provoke its context. Thus, rather than tattoos and piercings, the film treats traffic accidents and the resulting injuries as a pleasurable way to mark the body.

To regard *Crash* as an unqualified celebratory glance at refigurement would, however, be wrong. The visual style, the remoteness of characters and the narrative repetitions (which feel monotone if the rhythmic patterns are overlooked) coincide to frustrate a search for an expression of gratification based upon body control and manipulation. Passion should never, could never, feel so icily composed, but the 'refusal to get too excited' (Rodley 1997, 189) provides a backdrop of control against which sexuality and body modification are performed.

Based on J.G. Ballard's 1973 book of the same name, *Crash* depicts the open marriage of James G. Ballard (James Spader) and his wife Catherine (Deborah Kara Unger). After crashing into the automobile driven by Dr Helen Remington (Holly Hunter), a collision in which her husband is killed, James is drawn into a subculture of battered cars and bruised bodies. Orchestrated by Vaughan (Elias Koteas), the car-crash survivors restage famous automobile accidents, are transfixed by videotaped vehicle safety tests, and philosophize about what it all means. For the Ballards, this offers an escape from their jaded sex lives. These crash-junkies seek fulfilment from the tactile offspring of what Vaughan calls the 'fertilizing ... event' of the car crash. Physically, this is the dented chrome and the welted flesh; mentally, it is a mind-fuck that heightens the desire for physicality and tangibility, whilst giving it an erotic resonance. The crash produces a customized body, refigured and given new erogenous zones in the form of wounds and scars. If the death pile-up becomes the sexualized climax, these gouges are the new 'afterplay', which in conjunction with

the foreplay of devising the next crash, act as the substance of a new sexuality that shapes their bodies and their lives.

Roy Grundmann states that J.G. Ballard spoke of his book as 'the first pornographic novel based on technology' (1997, 24), and David Cronenberg notes how 'There is a desire to fuse with techno-ness' (in Rodley 1997, 200). Writers have continued the technology theme by placing the film version of *Crash* within Cronenberg's acknowledged oeuvre of chronicling the impact of science on the human body. Thus, Barbara Creed speaks of the car's 'potential to fuse with human flesh' (1998, 177), and Linda Ruth Williams assesses that 'men *become* embodied by fusing with their cars' (1999, 45). Whilst I acknowledge a duality of car and human body that plays with and extends notions of sexualized car designs and the gendering of vehicles by their owners, it appears to me that the film is more concerned with developing broader cultural debates about self-mutilation, body image and sexuality than it is about issues of technology.

My reasoning is guided by there being metaphorical rather than literal mergers within *Crash*, which differentiates it from other Cronenberg films (e.g. the human video cassette recorder in his 1982 film *Videodrome*, Brundlefly from *The Fly* (USA, 1986) and the talking insect typewriter of *Naked Lunch* (Canada/UK 1991)). The film also loses the organic sexualization of the car portrayed in the novel. Gone are the body fluids dripping from dashboards and mixing with engine oils, instead we have a colder, more stylized and segmented display of body and machine. In becoming a film, the car crash has been split into an event to be (re)enacted and a means of influencing body form.

I do not deny that the Ballards' claiming of Vaughan's written-off Lincoln convertible (the same model John F. Kennedy was assassinated in) is equivalent to

the claiming of Vaughan's body.²⁷ However, the merger through death seems to be specific to Vaughan, a man who lived in his car. Although Catherine and James deliberately stage their own crash at the end of the film, with James reassuring her that 'Maybe [in] the next one' she will die, it is difficult to believe that her Mazda could ever be claimed like Vaughan's Lincoln. The death wish they share appears to have another rationale, not fusion but interchange between the human body and the car. Both are customizable, both are fetishized, and both can be damaged, dented and scarred before being repaired and made functional once more. Through adopting a mindset that reverses the personification of automobiles, the human body is viewed as an entity, which rather than being disfigured can become refigured in the same manner a smashed Lincoln convertible has character not damage. Yet there remains what should still be a fundamental difference: cars can be written-off but cannot die, the human body must die.

Vaughan talks of his project involving a 'benevolent psychopathology' and it appears to surmount the contradiction. He proclaims that the car crash is 'a liberation of sexual energy mediating the sexuality of those who have died with ... an intensity that's impossible in any other form'. To understand his assertion, we need to regard his fatal crash as the ultimate extreme experience for and of the human body. Death or write-off, as the pinnacle of body modification, was something he no longer wished to approach asymptotically. Consequently, he embraced and controlled what cannot be controlled, and chose a flamboyantly Westernized *seppuku* as the means to achieve it. Vaughan's ritualized death, although not disembowelment, is an honourable and symbolic spilling of his guts: a confession and revelation of the body and its control through modification.

²⁷ David Cronenberg has compared the scene with his desire to claim Marilyn Monroe's body after her suicide when no one came forward to claim it (in Rodley 1997, 200). Although an insightful comparison, we must recognize the stark difference between the whole body of Marilyn Monroe (with no visible damage) and the mutilated car that represents Vaughan.

The automobile is not incidental though, for it has a special place in Western society. It is associated with freedom and doomed rebellion, is glorified through races and mythologized through famous deaths, and is culturally defined as a passion wagon yet also a mobile deathtrap. The amalgamation of sex and death propagates the peculiarly eroticized environment that Vaughan refers to as his project. Vaughan's, and later Catherine's, acceptance of death as purely another example of sensually performed body modification, whilst wresting control of the eventuality, reasserts the car's cultural significance. I therefore believe it is not fusing with technology or techno-ness that orders the film's theme, but an exploration of human agency and control of the body.

Bruise Control

Watching *Crash* is a bruising experience. In spite of the well-documented problems concerning distribution and the media outcry in the United Kingdom,²⁸ I am not describing any damaged sensibility on the part of spectators; rather I refer to the formal qualities presented on the screen. A relatively low-budget movie, location shooting on vast highways meant a dependency on available light, both natural and street lighting, with only foreground objects lit to blend in with the setting. Cronenberg has described the visual effect as 'much more like found art' than the style of his previous three films which were largely studio-based (in Rodley 1997, 192). The notion of finding is misleading though, for Cronenberg has also stressed how the urban lighting in conjunction with the costumes produced a palate of 'bruise colors – purples and violets and dark browns and yellows and blues and blacks' (in Smith 1997, 27). These colours frequently smother the image, appearing as mauve

²⁸ For a summary of the problems *Crash* faced in the United Kingdom see Kermode and Petley (1997).

illuminated steam (figure 3.12), violet light refracted through smoke, and grey hue reflections in car windows and bodywork. Purple curtains blend with brown interiors, grey concrete superstructures and yellowy orange side lighting. A silver blue tinge envelopes most exterior shots, allowing infrequent uses of red to appear strikingly via brake lights and costumes, and muted as the interior of Vaughan's car. Such imagery suggests both the delicacy and the beauty of the bruise.

The narrative structure of *Crash* is equally stylized. Its beginning, three consecutive sex scenes, has prompted Cronenberg to recall, on more than one occasion, how at a test screening he was told: "A series of sex scenes is not a plot." Cronenberg's reply of "Why not? Who says?" merely highlights the breaking of conventions (in Rodley 1997, 199).²⁹ What it does not stress is how mundane sex is made to appear in the opening of the film. The sex between Catherine and the pilot, and James and the camera girl, is conveyed in both instances as remote and routine. There is no communication between participants, distractions occur (Catherine is preoccupied by the aircraft's texture and James is interrupted), and the cold hard metal surfaces of the wing and the camera case dissipate rather than resonate the sexual charge derived from the semi-public locations. The sex scene between the Ballards that follows confirms the impression, especially through the dispassionate questioning of whether the women had climaxed in the earlier sex acts. The physical and verbal probing smack of a catechism enacted by longtime-lapsed believers. On a balcony set against the Toronto skyline, with freeways of endless traffic below, the pair fuck, free of moral obligations, but seemingly battered into submission by their pursuit of pleasure. The erotic detachedness has prompted critics to describe the film's power as emanating from 'its apparent coolness' (Rodley 1997, 189), its 'coldness and artifice of style' (M. Grant 1998, 180), and its 'sombre, even pensive'

²⁹ See also Smith (1997, 20).



Figure 3.12 Bruise colour scheme of *Crash*

manner (Creed 1998, 175). Thus, passion has returned to its etymological roots of *passio*, meaning suffering (from the Latin *pati*, to suffer), because it has become an endurance of an obsession. But by the camera's drifting over the edge of the balcony, which plays on the common urge to jump when placed at a perilous height, a tantalizing and unexpected route to satisfaction is offered, namely danger.

The sex scene triptych announces the narrative's reliance upon repetition and variation, stressing the mechanics of sex, life and later, death. The Ballards' lifestyle is the very essence of control, and the acting serves to heighten the impression. For most of the film, Deborah Unger seems disengaged, looking off-screen, even in the midst of passion. Dialogue is sparse, delivered staccato fashion, and perpetuates the trait of inquiry. Denied conventional character identification and development, 'the sex scenes are *absolutely* the plot and the character development' (David Cronenberg in Rodley 1997, 199). That the other sex scenes in the film are predicated on refigurement makes body modification key.

Wounds of Love

Wounds, and in particular, scars, dominate *Crash*. Some are temporary bruises, but many are the nodular folds of compacted cicatrized tissue that, in spite of healing, suggest restriction and deformity. These body marks bring with them particular cultural connotations. The scar has traditionally been associated with pirates, thieves and villains, and the notion has been perpetuated throughout cinematic history, with the titular protagonist of *Scarface* (Howard Hawks, USA, 1932) and Chief Scar in *The Searchers* (John Ford, USA, 1956) being two explicitly named examples. However, a few films tangentially address the erotic resonance of the scar.

Circus of Horrors (Sidney Hayers, UK, 1960) depicts a plastic surgeon hiding from the police after an operation has gone wrong. Using a circus as a cover to enable him to continue his experiments, he successfully operates on disfigured women, whom he subsequently uses in the circus, most notably in the Temple of Beauty. What is of interest in the context of *Crash*, is how mesmerized and seemingly enraptured the surgeon is by scarred faces. In one notable scene, he raises a child's face as if studying a great beauty, but he is actually admiring her scar. After the operation, the removal of the girl's dressing is equally eroticized, with the surgeon encouraging her to 'feel the scissors cutting away the bandages'.

She Freak (Byron Mabe, USA, 1967) also objectifies the scarred body in a sensual manner. In a partial remake of *Freaks*, the central character kills a carnival dwarf, and is then mutilated by other members of the troupe to make her into a sideshow exhibit. As the climax to the story, we witness her with one side of her body heavily scarred, including an eye gouged out, whilst the other side remains as the 'pretty young girl' she was declared to be at the beginning of the film. The supposed dichotomy of beauty and scarring is condensed in this image.

One mainstream film that does explicitly mention the scarred body and eroticism

is *Shirley Valentine* (Lewis Gilbert, USA, 1989), but it resorts to comedy to denounce it. Having gone out on a date, the eponymous Shirley (Pauline Collins) is romping with her Greek waiter companion (Tom Conti). Shirley exclaims, 'You kissed my stretchmarks!' The waiter replies with a lengthy celebration of her scars, finally declaring: 'Be proud.... These marks show ... that you are alive, that you survived. Don't try to hide these lines, they are the marks of life.' Shirley Valentine turns to the camera and pointedly undercuts his remarks by stating, 'Aren't men full of shit.' In *Shirley Valentine*, scars can never be seen as a confirmation of existence, a mark from a particularly memorable moment in life, or a source of erotic pleasure. But that is exactly how they can function for devotees of tattoos, piercings and cicatrization, and it is how they are defined in *Crash*.

To understand the correlation between the refigurements in *Crash* and the body adornment practices of contemporary culture, it is beneficial to note a primary discourse surrounding body modification. Michel Foucault states that 'The classical age discovered the body as object and target of power' (1991, 136). He highlights how a range of disciplinary powers began to act on the body, such as architectural space, timekeeping and coding of activities to create a disciplined or 'docile body': one 'that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved' (1991, 136). The discourse of disciplining the body has proliferated in modern society to the extent that it has become such platitudes as 'you are what you eat' and 'no pain, no gain'. Many participants have seen body modification as a denouncement of the docility and a repossessing of the body. Raelyn Gallina expresses this idea:

To ask to be cut (not in a violent situation, but in a loving, supportive, trusting situation) and then bleed and then end up with something beautiful ... and then it heals and you have it and you're proud of it – that can be very empowering. It can be a *reclaiming* for a lot of people. (In Juno 1989a, 105)

It has also been argued that the very permanency of the decoration, and the enduring

of what is often a painful process, indicates a commitment to the body. Thus, David Curry states: 'I was also pleased to have done something not just for myself but specifically for my body' (1993, 73). What unites both beliefs is their highlighting of the corporeal as an entity.

Moreover, the results of scarification and piercing would in any other setting be wounds. Indeed, as I have already noted, in the media they are frequently associated with self-mutilation (see Pitts 1999). However, such a view completely disregards the fact that the latter is non-decorative, usually hidden, and 'is "addictive", beyond the control of the self' (Benson 2000, 249): the very opposite of body modification. *Crash* interprets this pathologizing discourse, but consciously reverses the relationship. The wound is removed from its medicalized environment, where deliberate cutting is socially sanctioned and wounds are treated; instead, the injuries are desired, craved even, as body adornments. Even the hospital James Ballard is taken to is not a 'real' hospital: it is a ward reserved for air-crash victims, which lies in a vacuous state awaiting a disaster. We do not see any emergency personnel, only Vaughan, disguised in a white coat and impersonating a hospital photographer. His inquiring gaze is not the authorized medical examination; it is the lustful look of a voyeur. But the scars in *Crash* operate as more than just images for voyeuristic pleasure, as a study of Ballard's injuries will reveal.

James Ballard's crash into Dr Remington's car works as an abrupt and half-glanced epiphany: a realization not a conversion. The discovery is the corporeal body, its tangibility, and its facility to be modified through death and impact. Dispensing with cinematic conventions, the crash, like all those depicted in the film, is unspectacular. Instead of explosions, cars rolling and slow-motion replays, the vehicles come to an immediate stop as their fenders bend and their bonnets buckle. Through the car crash being downplayed, the emphasis is firmly on the impact on the

humans.

Hanging limply, a body oozes fragility, whilst a close-up of the weal on its hand is diegetically matched with the car bonnet's insignia. The refigurement of the body in a beautiful way is suggested, as well as the scar's iconic ability to be a badge worn with pride.³⁰ Cutting to Ballard's point of view, Dr Remington struggles to free herself, and jerks open her blouse, exposing her breast and a scarlet mark across her neck caused by her safety belt. As she continues to struggle, slow metallic guitar chords puncture the soundtrack, and a change of camera angle reveals Ballard fixated by the scene before him.

The music bridges a cut to the next scene where we see an extreme close-up of a heavily bruised and gashed limb encased in surgical steel scaffolding (figure 3.13). As montage theory has shown, juxtapositions of images can create various emotions, depending upon the relationship of the shots. From a scene containing the eroticism of the bare breast, we have cut to the exhibition of the wound, and in the process, have carried some of the sensuality with it.

The camera slowly moves up the limb, and the extent of the control exerted on the leg is thrust upon the spectator. The angular cage-like structure clashes with the fleshy, hairy leg, enforcing rigidity and disclosing its imposition through the stigmata around each pin that punctures the limb. These graphic zones are testament to the body's resistance to the control. Concurrently, the contraption, combining rope and polished metal, evokes a BDSM'er's plaything; the sentiment is reinforced two shots later when it is shown to be holding Ballard's leg in the air (figure 3.14). This medium long shot of Ballard in bed, his leg hoisted up and his open robe divulging

³⁰ Fashion model Padma Lakshmi has experienced very similar sentiments in respect of the seven-inch scar on her arm that she received in a car crash. She proclaims that 'I ... knew my scar was a symbol of my survival' (Lakshmi 2001, 55), but having undergone painful chemical dermabrasion to reduce the dark pigment of her scar tissue, the photographer Helmut Newton is said to have shrieked at the model, 'You've ruined the beauty of it' (in Lakshmi 2001, 57).

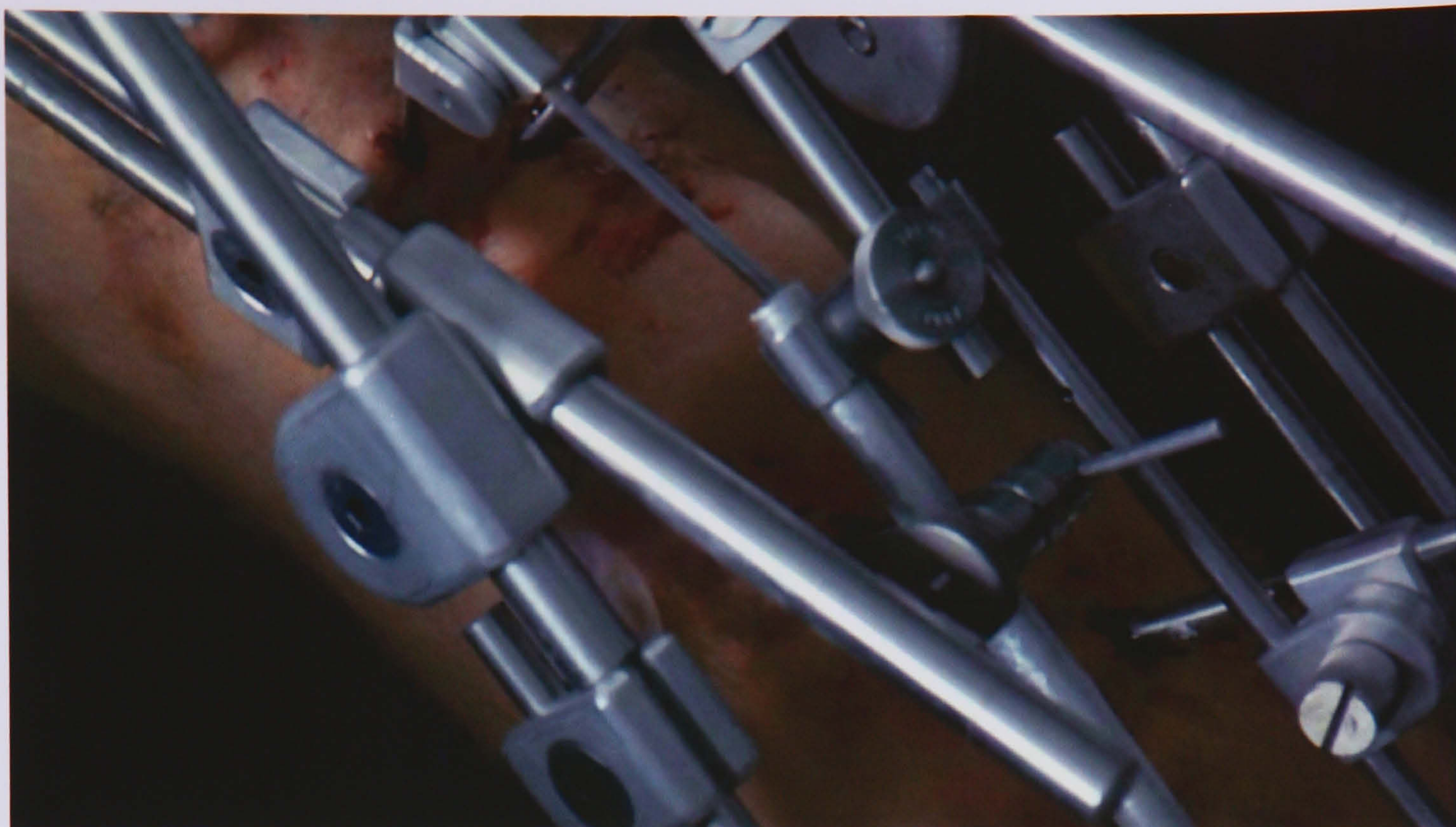


Figure 3.13 Rigid containment of the wound in *Crash*

his torso down to his thigh, has a similar impure overtone to that of a photograph by Romain Slocombe (figure 3.15). Both images coalesce, and some would argue clash, sexuality with apparent bodily injuries

An obvious difference between the two images, besides the media, is that Slocombe's photograph depicts a woman. Rosemarie Garland Thomson states that, 'If the male gaze informs the normative female self as a sexual spectacle, then the stare sculpts the disabled subject as a grotesque spectacle' (1997, 285). Evidently, the beautified woman in Slocombe's photograph is not portrayed as grotesque or monstrous. The situation is even more pronounced in the image of James Ballard. As a male body, it is legitimate that he shows some form of scarring; indeed, scars can even be regarded as fundamental for ruggedness. But craggy handsomeness is typically based upon scarring acquired during a mysterious past, not through recent damage, so Ballard represents something else.³¹ Essentially, both Ballard and

³¹ The one exception to traditional scarring in films is the bullet wound. These recent breaks in the skin have been fetishized in many westerns, especially through the tending of the injury by a woman. But the bullet wound, even in contemporary cinema, tends to be eroticized discretely, for when desire is made explicit, the fetishism is played for laughs, as in *The Whole Nine Yards* (Jonathan Lynn, USA, 2000).

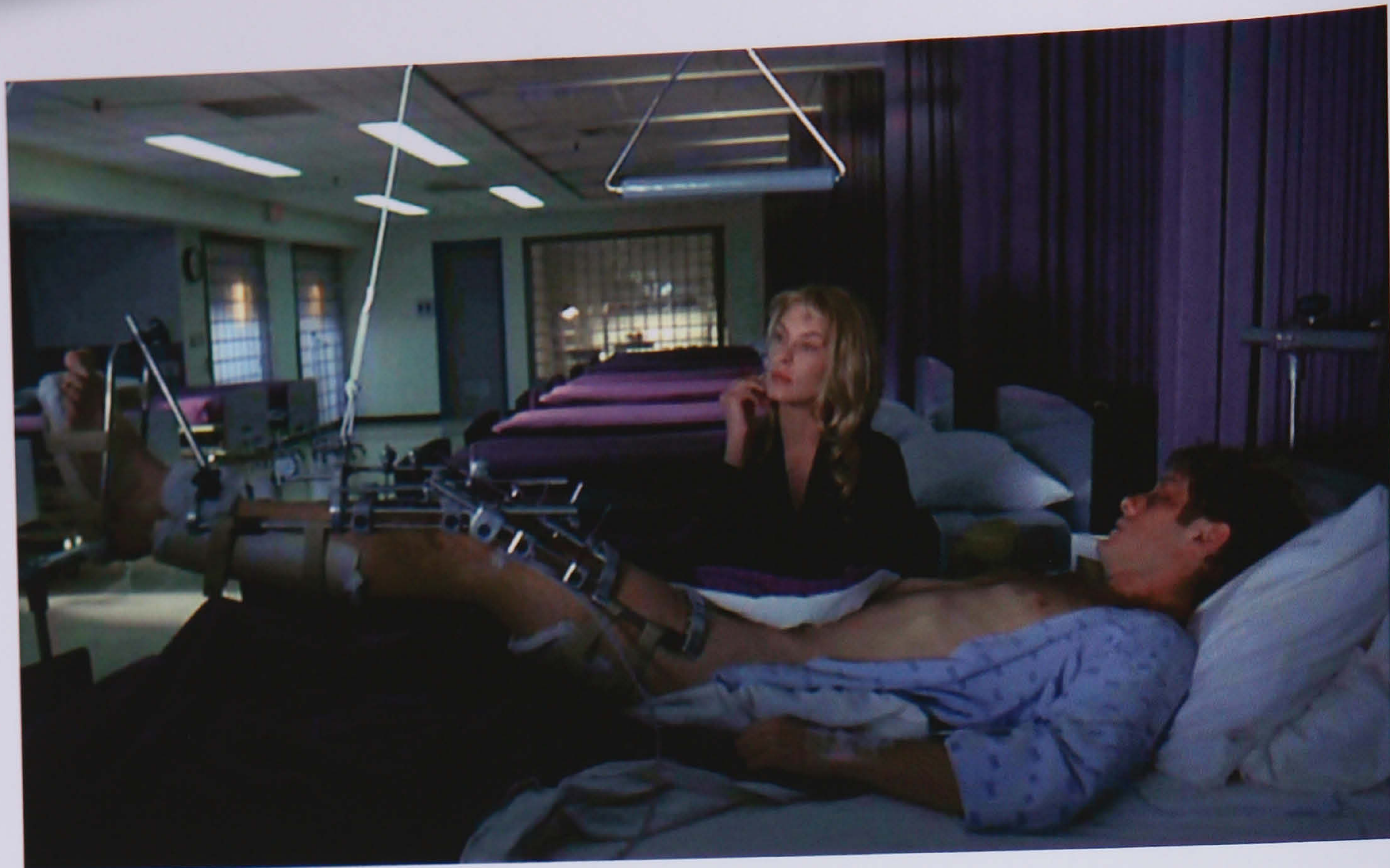


Figure 3.14 Sexualized spectacle of pain (I) - James Ballard in *Crash*



Figure 3.15 Sexualized spectacle of pain (II) - *Yuka on her bed with orthopaedic collar and bandages* (1994) by Romain Slocombe

Slocombe's model offer a sexualized spectacle that exists not in spite of, but because of the sense of disability. In both images, the semi-nakedness is enhanced and eroticized by a vulnerability enacted through the positioning of the subjects' legs and the injuries that restrain them.

What is significant in the case of James Ballard is that it is a male body that is sexualized whilst being incapacitated. Richard Dyer has written in respect of the male pin-up that 'the image of the man is one caught in the middle of an action, or associated, through images in the pictures, with activity' (1982, 67). If not involved in an activity, it is implied by a taut physique, muscularity and straining. Unlike the tortured male discussed in the previous chapter, Ballard exhibits none of these, but is acceptably objectified because of his passivity. (How can he be blamed for lying there with his chest bared when he is injured?) Furthermore, the scars work as an inverse of the muscularity: where one implies hardness and impenetrability, the other implies softness and penetrability

Simultaneously, Ballard is sexualized via his injuries, as can be noted by the shot of his whole body being bracketed by two overtly sexual images. Firstly, there is a close-up of a jagged scar, bruising on soft flesh, and downy hair. The extreme closeness denies us knowledge of which part of the body it is, and a pulse in the top left-hand corner generates a sensual throbbing. Having just seen a leg in close-up, a natural conclusion is that this is a groin; but after holding the shot for 2 ½ seconds, the camera slowly pans up the neck to the face to reveal staring eyes and a stitched-up nose. The other bracketing shot is an overhead of Ballard's bruised face and scarred bare chest. The spectator's eye is drawn to his blackened orbs, then across his hairy chest to a bald area just below his bared left nipple. The emphasis on the left breast, with scarring above, links Ballard back to the sexualized image of Helen Remington in the crashed car. What is more, the very nature of a nipple, with its

areola of darkened engorged skin, links it to a scar. The cicatrized flesh is therefore eroticized and aestheticized, thus visually incorporating a pleasure in pain.

The erotic tone could be greatly undermined by the knowledge that Ballard is injured, but as already discussed, the location is not defined as a conventional therapeutic space. Furthermore, as the scene progresses, Ballard is shown to be lucid, without pain, and in no sense traumatized by events. It is striking that a film about sexual gratification from body injury, withholds the emotion of pain as well as pleasure. Of course, the narrative expresses the sensation of pain through audience expectations on seeing a bruise or a scar, but no central character is seen to experience them as pain.

The extent that this deviates from an actual trauma is revealed by noting a medical description of the impact of a sudden change in appearance. Norman R. Bernstein states of burns patients that, 'The person experiences life-endangering agony in a hospital emergency ward, a busy medical intensive care setting. He/she suffers horrifying agony, isolation, confusion, manipulation, and multiple incomprehensible procedures' (1990, 137). Ballard's situation is the antithesis of Bernstein's description, for there is no medical invasion of his space. In sharp contrast to the control exerted over his leg by the metal frame, there is no impression that Ballard as a whole is under anyone's control except his own. Indeed, subjection is not a feature of *Crash*, rather the converse is. In an existentialist way, Catherine and James Ballard will embrace the fact that they are condemned to be free, and the car crash, with its refigurement process and potential for death, will assert it. At this moment in the film, that notion of control is just beginning to grow, but all Ballard needs to take him one stage further is the catalyst of Vaughan.

Ballard first encounters Vaughan in a hallway near the ward.³² Dressed in an officious white coat, Ballard believes he is a medical person. Vaughan looks Ballard up and down, and the shot cuts to a side view of Vaughan that stresses his pockmarks and a deep facial scar. Crouching down to examine Ballard more closely, Vaughan touches the clamps on Ballard's leg; his constant chewing suggests heated salivating. Without looking up, Vaughan asks: 'Crash victim?' Through Ballard's affirmative response, he is brought under a medical taxonomy. However, rather than victim merely conveying someone who has suffered, it also contains the concept of someone who is part of a ritualistic offering, with the reading of veneration enhanced by Vaughan being on his knees at Ballard's feet. Blatantly, Ballard is an object of desire, and the pleasure Vaughan experiences from continuing to inspect the injuries is shown by his intake of breath and his conscious restraining of his hand from touching more of the leg.

Standing up, Vaughan emphasizes the various sensual pleasures of the wounds by seemingly sniffing and scrutinizing the scars on Ballard's face. Accepting the role of the docile body that is apparently exposed to the medical gaze, Ballard reveals his chest and invites more examination. Performing a kind of courtship ritual, Vaughan and Ballard's hands mark out the territory of refigurement. The eroticism of the wounds is partly disguised by the latent presence of homoeroticism; however, the implication is that the men have made a discovery of a shared desire that exceeds conventional sexualities.

For Ballard, and the audience, it is the beginning of a realization of the pleasures available within the dynamics of control of both the body image and another person's

³² The primary importance of the scene is Ballard encountering Vaughan, but we should recognize that it is preceded by Ballard and Remington also bumping into each other. As part of the film's style of repetition and variation, both sequences employ limited dialogue, which begins with an inquiry of name, have characters trading stares, draw attention to injuries, and have emotions running high. But whilst the former is aggressive and suppresses knowledge, Vaughan's inspection of Ballard is lustful and revelatory.

body. Only partially aware of it, Ballard has been party to a game of doctors and nurses: a pseudo-domination pursuit complete with masterful eyes and inquiring hands. The spectator has witnessed a delight in what Richard Kern in his introduction to Romain Slocombe's book *City of the Broken Dolls: A Medical Art Diary, Tokyo 1993-1996* called a 'trauma history' (1997, unnumbered). Acting as a physiognomic biography, the scar indicates body experience and mystery. But a scar is more than a memory, it has a metamorphic property; thus, from the initial gash, it bleeds, it scabs, it weeps, and eventually heals and begins to fade. On leaving hospital, Ballard demonstrates the pleasures of this healing process.

During his time in hospital, the changes to the marks on Ballard's body operate as a progression of time. The successive scenes show gradually reduced swelling, leg hoists removed, and stitches gone. But the transient quality of the wound is foregrounded on Ballard's return home. Cutting from a shot of Ballard in a taxi, we view a high overhead of a freeway busy with moving traffic (figure 3.16). The shot cuts again to a pan of Ballard's copiously scarred leg as Catherine caresses it. The movement of the camera reverses the dominant diagonal flow of the traffic, whilst Ballard's leg, on a similar alignment to the freeway, takes on the perspective of landscape, the numerous scars functioning as cars (figure 3.17). The implication, besides reminding the spectator of the part played by cars in creating the wounds, is organic change or progress. Catherine's stroking of the leg reinforces our understanding of the improvement in its condition, for her hand is no longer prevented from doing so (in the way Vaughan's was) by the metal cage.

The handling of the wound is vital for the spectacle of pleasure. Catherine's hand touches the gashes as a means of coming to terms with the damage, but in addition, to somehow feel the hurt. She fingers each lump in an assessment of pain and damage. The willing of pain could be called an empathetic stance, but there is an



Figure 3.16 Freeway of cars in *Crash*



Figure 3.17 Leg of scars in *Crash*

additional component based upon needing to know how it feels. Although touching the area of damage, Catherine is still isolated from the pain. An analogous experience, but one step further removed, is felt by the spectator who, positioned as voyeur, has to attempt a comprehension of the pain. But as I stressed earlier, pain itself is never explicitly expressed in *Crash*, it is only alluded to in moments such as

this, and later in the film when Ballard lays his fingers over the palm-print bruise left on Catherine's inner thigh following violent sex with Vaughan. The controlled severity of the Ballards' relationship is therefore replaced by a yearning to experience each other's body in different ways. But the film's icily detached tone remains, provoking a tension with the forcefulness of the injuries. Consequently, the scene tingles and throbs via the sensual touching of the wound.

Besides comprehension of pain, the scene hints at the pleasures of caring. Although having the potential for gratification through domination, here I refer to the joy of caring for the wound. Tattooees and piercees have spoken of the enjoyment of the healing process (Sweetman 1999a, 170). An element of the satisfaction is a continuation of the acknowledgement of the body and its physicality. An additional factor is the immediate rush of endorphins that can mask the pain after body modification practices. And another pleasure is derived from ensuring satisfactory healing of the final refigurement. In effect, the caring is part of the creation process. It is noticeable too that when Catherine leaves for work, it is the scar on Ballard's forehead that she kisses, rather than his lips. Part care, part fetishistic attraction, her action would be a natural but involuntary one for many people. Showing affection towards the surface site of pain can evidently be pleasurable and compelling.

However, Catherine's tenderness does not stretch to the spectator seeing the dressing of wounds or the gentle bathing of scars.³³ Consequently, fascination rather than caring is projected as her main motivation, in particular, her pursuit of Ballard's sensations. At one point, Catherine digs her hard thumbnail into the vulnerable, soft flesh of Ballard's smashed-up appendage. There is no malice, just a desire to feel a

³³ *The Night Porter*, which is more concerned with oscillations of pain and pleasure via power relations, does combine tending and desire. For example, Max uses a pair of forceps and a swab of cotton wool to hygienically dab Lucia's cut arm, before grasping her limb and kissing the wound. In a later scene, Lucia washes Max's foot with the hand he had cut by stamping upon it amidst a pile of broken glass.

sensation. Catherine's immediate smoothing of the area with the ball of her hand supports the impression that hers is a quest for tangibility and experience through pain, not sadistic domination. Further, the scene hints at a marked contrast to the blandness of the sex scenes that opened the film. The wounds are erotic, physical and contain an intensity that seeps from their encapsulation of a traumatic creation. They suggest a warm liquid interior that is alive and tingling with agitated pain receptors and neurons. The bodily presence of the scar is beginning to fill the void created by the lack of emotional release in sex.

The extreme pleasure of wounds makes them not only enjoyable but their acquisition desirable. Later in the film, Vaughan calls Ballard to the hospital to talk to him 'about the project'. Lying in a mauve operating chair, Vaughan is having a life-size tattoo of a Lincoln steering wheel etched on his scarred chest. This culturally prevalent and acceptable (in comparison with scarification) body modification is blatantly being linked to the nature of Vaughan's project.³⁴ The tattoo is a medical one, making it limited in colour and virtually schematic, but it still embellishes the body, not with beauty but with significance ('make it ragged and dirty'). With the image pre-empting the planned penetration of his body by an actual steering wheel in his fatal crash, Vaughan is correct to call it a 'prophetic tattoo'. Further, by overlaying existing scars, Vaughan claims back his body whilst simultaneously defining its destiny. Thus, Vaughan's tattoo serves not merely as a body adornment but as a rite of passage: it is the prelude to the ultimate body modification of death, and prompts Vaughan's relationship with Ballard to reach its sexual conclusion.

For this to take place, Ballard has to receive a reciprocal mark: a Lincoln car

³⁴ David Cronenberg has acknowledged that this scene refers to current debates in society regarding body piercing and self-mutilation, and stresses that it was his idea to incorporate into the script the tattooing of a steering wheel on Vaughan's body (in Rodley 1997, 200).

emblem tattooed on his inner thigh.³⁵ BDSM practitioners have spoken of the Dom having the Sub pierced or marked in some way to denote ownership,³⁶ whilst piercees and tattooees have described how their marks have acted as bonds with loved ones (Sweetman 1999a, 171-2; Juno and Vale 1989, 165). Ballard's tattoo is both a type of branding that indicates Vaughan's claim over his body, and a visible gift of love in the way a wedding ring is, but heightened by the vulnerable context of body modification. In effect, it is a bond that both restrains and unites.³⁷

However, although David Curry has found that there is 'some overlap between people who have body piercings for decorative purposes and those who have them for sado-masochistic purposes' (1993, 78), he asserts that they 'are generally engaged in separately, in different circumstances and are felt to be different activities, even when engaged in by the same person' (1993, 78). In other words, one is undergone as a sexual activity involving pain and domination; the other can have an erotic dimension, but is usually based upon a delayed display and/or stimulation of erogenous zones. *Crash* distorts and conflates the two into a sexualized refigurement by making the modification sites supplementary or alternative erogenous zones.

Cutting from Ballard agreeing to the tattoo, we next see a close-up of Vaughan delicately removing the wadding that protects the wound. Replicating Catherine's tenderness, Vaughan eases the surgical tape from the hairs on the leg and unveils the fresh tattoo, complete with bruising (a marked contrast to *Tattoo*). The scene

³⁵ The film does not make it explicit that Vaughan decides the location of the tattoo, for Ballard's question of 'Where do you think that one should go?' is only answered by the downward glance of the tattooist. However, I am in no doubt that the implication is that he has told the tattooist where the design will be, and this reading is enhanced by the published script, in which Vaughan grabs the inside of his thigh to locate the region.

³⁶ Although it has traditionally been the case that the Dom (or top) was not marked. Sheree Rose has stated that the growth of body modification as a subculture has prompted many to also be pierced or marked in some way (in Juno 1989b, 109). The shift has been utilized to create an alternative ending to that of the novel for Just Jaeckin's film version of *Histoire d'O/The Story of O*.

³⁷ We saw a similar scenario in *Bob & Sheree's Contract* when Sheree carved her initial on Bob's body.

continues to build on past images: by reformulating Ballard's gentle caressing of the bruises on Catherine's inner thigh, the three characters are now linked via the essence of body scars.

Vaughan breathes heavily and proceeds to mouth the virgin sore in a lustful sexual foreplay of the wound. The attraction of the tattoo to Vaughan is therefore different to that experienced by Karl in *Tattoo*. For Vaughan, the tattoo is a controlled lesion, which means its impact will deteriorate over time. He values the tattoo as a susceptible gash, once healed, its superficial existence as a design on the skin will deny it most of its value, except as a symbolic bond. Vaughan's approach involves a mastering of the corporeal; it is about sculpting, transforming, penetrating and resealing the body. Where the tattoo in society is traditionally the expression of the self via the body, Vaughan's project is loaded with the desire to express the body and its refigurement. And whereas the tattoo is a permanent fixture, a quality I have already noted that is highly important to devotees, the wounds in *Crash* are fundamentally metamorphic and active through their healing. It is true that tattoos change as the skin and the inks age, thus darkening and blurring, and it is also true that the scars in *Crash* will never totally disappear, but like piercings, these wounds will seal unless kept open.

The bonded scar is still important as a memory and a record, as well as a tactile protuberance that shapes the human body, but it is the sensitive new sore that contains the greatest erotic charge. In this respect it is strongly associated with BDSM, for on a continuum with a BDSM ritualized cutting of the skin at one end and a perfectly healed new body piercing at the other, the injuries in *Crash* would be closer to the former. However, the refigurement is as much mental as physical. No longer are scars and wounds to be avoided at all cost, they are sought out. The heightened sensations of the wound cannot be called pain, yet offer an exquisite pain

that is craved.

When Vaughan rhapsodizes about the liberation of sexual energy through car crashes, he is articulating a variation on the theme of the adrenalin rush of extreme sports (of which I will say more in Chapter 5), but now not founded on risk, but dependent upon planned failure. Indeed, risk is no longer a valid term, as revealed by Catherine's unconvincing attempt to draw sexual excitement from the fact that 'Anyone could have walked in' whilst she was having sex with the pilot in the opening scene. So with danger ineffectual as an enhancement of sexual release, actual sensations are demanded.

What therefore takes place between Vaughan and Ballard via the baring of the intimate and damaged regions of their bodies is a consummation of their respective tattoos. As wounds, they provide a bridge between the mortal and living body; through being self-inflicted, they demonstrate control over the corporeal body. As primary signs of pain, they function as loci of dramatic sensations, an impression formed by their redness, and accentuated by the knowledge of the scar's ability to fundamentally change the shape of the human body. But in union with these vibrant, tangible properties is the erotic effect of coding the swelling, the gash, and the refigurement as an additional erogenous zone. The product of this is a potential to unsettle gender boundaries.

Sexuality Amidst Refigurement: 'Is there something here that interests you?'

Far more than *Boxing Helena*, *Crash*, with its sex scenes involving refigured crash survivors, flirts with the taboo of the sexuality of the disabled. The urge to see yet not see drives the fascination of the spectacle of pain, and permeates the accident site and the compulsion to stare at the disabled. Gabrielle (Rosanna Arquette) forces

home this equation at the car showroom. Wearing black boots, a miniskirt, fetishwear jacket with zips, black fishnet hose, and rigid callipers, she drapes herself over a soft-top Mercedes, forcing her skirt to ride up to deliberately reveal a vagina-like scar on the back of her thigh (figure 3.18). A young salesman hurries over, and then slows as he sees her disability. Through crosscutting between him and a shot that is a close-up of his point of view, we watch his eyes hesitantly glance down at her legs. Speaking to Gabrielle, but blatantly expressing his and the spectator's thought process, he asks, 'Is there something here that interests you?' The close-up has already compelled the audience to look, now the question requests the audience to assess their feelings and confront their own voyeurism: should I be looking at this? Should I be finding it erotic? Isn't this person disabled? Gabrielle responds with a sultry glance over her shoulder; the shot deliberately withholding the wound. Intimidated, the salesman's furtive avoidance of her gaze merely takes his eyes back to the off-screen gash. The salesman is left embarrassed; the spectator is left unfulfilled.

It should be noted that Rosanna Arquette as Gabrielle is exaggeratedly attractive, not least because she is a Hollywood actress, but also because of her bondage-style costume, blonde hair and bright red lipstick. The intersection of disability and explicit beauty emboldens the tension. For David Cronenberg, the use of 'attractive people' in the film makes it more pornographic than the novel (in Smith 1997, 19-20). The BBFC deem it significant too. In a statement that reeks of prejudice, and is given authority via the comments being attributed to a forensic psychologist, the BBFC declares that no known sexual fetish is shown in *Crash* and 'Nor is the sex scene with a woman in callipers fetishistic, since she is shown to be sexually attractive despite her scars or limb supports and not because of them' (in Poulter



Figure 3.18 Confronting disability and sexuality in *Crash*

1997, 6).³⁸ The logic demonstrated here is that attractive people cannot be fetishized and conversely, people with disabilities cannot be attractive unless you can disembody them from their disabilities. Such an opinion is both reactionary and offensive.

For me, although *Crash* skirts around the issue of equating disability with ugliness, it says something equally important, which is that disfigurement and/or refigurement are usually opposed to beauty in Western society. Drawing on work by Fred Davis, Rosemarie Garland Thomson tells how a female wheelchair user, whom she states is recognized as beautiful, found that ‘people often respond to her as if this combination of traits were a remarkable and lamentable contradiction’ (1997, 285). Gabrielle’s body brace, her moulded walking stick, and her limp when walking all define her as disabled, and apply a comparable sentiment to the scene, with the salesman embodying lust and discomfort. Although saturated with negativity towards the disability, the scene does frame its debate not in terms of people with disabilities

³⁸ The forensic psychologist, Dr Paul Britton later claimed the BBFC misrepresented him (see Kermode and Petley 1997, 18), but my point remains, as the statement was issued with the intention of justifying the release of *Crash*.

being physically challenged, but being challenging through their physicality.

Jacqueline Tellalian, the disabled model featured in the Joel-Peter Witkin photograph included earlier in this chapter (see figure 3.11) makes a pertinent point: ‘There is a beauty to deformity, on some levels, if you allow yourself to see it as not necessarily deformed but different, and knowing that not everybody is perfectly proportioned’ (in the television programme *Vile Bodies*, ‘Naked’, 1998). Crucially, incorporating body modification into the discourse encourages such a discovery. *Crash* eroticizes this asexual, but highly sexual difference. Gabrielle’s black cane, with rubberized, nodular butt plug-handle is evidence of the erotic distinctiveness of her body. Unlike the Mercedes, which is described as ‘designed for a normal body’, the walking aid, seen in close-up between Gabrielle’s legs, then twisted and examined in the salesman’s hands, sets her apart from the mundane norm. The scene visualizes, in a sexual environment, the politically correct appellation applied to the disabled: special people. The walking stick is working as the reverse of its usual symbolic function, for as stated by Adrienne Asch and Michelle Fine about a woman with disabilities, ‘The very devices she values for enhancing free movement and communication (braces, crutches, hearing aids, or canes) may repel men seeking the fantasied flawlessness’ (1988, 244). Rather than being the object of the uninvited stare of disgust, Gabrielle is the director of the inquisitive imagination: ‘I wonder if?’ and ‘I wonder how?’ In contrast to Vaughan’s inspection of Ballard at the hospital, the object of the gaze is completely aware and in control.

When Gabrielle snags her leg brace on the leather interior, she plays the helpless invalid and requests assistance to get into the car. Her gaping crotch and thigh is a mass of fishnet, rivets, leather ties and supports. Wavering between the cultural taboos of touching a woman in such an intimate place, and not assisting someone with disabilities, the salesman turns around for advice, but none is forthcoming.

Hesitantly, he edges his hand along the brace and grasps the flesh of Gabrielle's leg before yanking it. A closer shot shows his fingers digging into the femoral muscle, emphasizing the corporeality, and connecting the transaction to Catherine's bruised thigh in the preceding scene.

The oblique confrontation of the sexuality of people with disabilities is essentially only an issue in relation to Gabrielle though, with a more general approach to sexuality, refigurement and corporeality forming the superstructure of *Crash*. Within the car showroom scene, facets of the broader picture are also on display, including a prevailing demonstration of the BDSM power dynamics and the pleasure of control. Passively awaiting the salesman taking charge, Gabrielle savours his rough manhandling. The physical exertion on her limp body is a delight for her, and her enjoyment is enhanced by the deception but also the emphatic role-play of being helpless. As with all BDSM submissives, she is in total charge of the scene.³⁹

Tom Shakespeare, in his study of sexuality and people with disabilities, states that 'Because people were not able to make love in a straightforward manner, or in a conventional position, they were impelled to experiment and enjoyed a more interesting sexual life as a result' (1996, 209). The quest for a more exciting sexual existence is undeniably a motivating factor for the Ballards, and their *modus operandi* is the control of the body via refigurement. Thus, *Crash* visualizes a rethinking of the sexual human body via a modification of the body form. What this facilitates is the potential for a resistance to sexual polemics, with gender and sexual differences being contracted into a corporeal body.

If we examine the use of scars and refigurement in sexual encounters, we find a positive displacement from gendered erogenous zones onto asexual wounds. For

³⁹ The salesman's ignorance of events necessitates me to stress this is not BDSM, only a sexual scene of control that borrows elements of its composition from the reciprocal sexual practice. However, like the films discussed in the previous chapter, the scene is imbued with sexual control that enables a BDSM reading.

example, breasts, which both Catherine and Helen Remington reveal and offer to their sexual partners, are usurped by the scarred chest. The raised skin of the nipple that Catherine presents to Vaughan is first twisted by him in an action that is both textural and refiguring (engorgement), and then replaced by Vaughan's deeply scarred pectoral region which Catherine uncovers and suckles. The synthesis of scar and nipple is bi-directional though, for when James tends to Catherine's battered body in the next scene, he kisses her graphically bruised nipple as well as another erogenous zone that trades on its raised surface, her equally swollen lips. These points of erotic focus have become areas of refigurement that coalesce the sensitivity of sexual stimulation with the tingling of wounds. The raw, tender flesh is saturated with emotional vibrancy. The scar is therefore a pleasure that enhances or substitutes for existing erogenous zones, but is not limited by gender boundaries. Thus, after Vaughan has kissed James's tattoo, James is taken to the crash co-ordinator's scarred breast, just as his wife had been before him.

James Myers's study of non-mainstream body modification reveals that: 'Sexual enhancement proved to be one of the most compelling reasons behind people's desire to alter their bodies' (1992, 288). Furthermore, Paul Sweetman found 'that certain piercings can lead to the "creation" or "re-discovery" of previously unexplored areas of erotogenic sensitivity' (1999a, 176). Similarly, in *Crash* the sexual body is remapped, with bisexuality emerging from the scar and the gash. Vaughan and James's sexual liaison in the front seat of the Lincoln develops from the foreplay of the chest scar to the fellatio of the thigh tattoo. The penetrating penis has, for this moment at least, been exchanged for the inscribed cut, or the penetrated body. The permeability of the body that defines traditional body modification prompts Paul Sweetman to suggest it might be seen as working against a privileging of the self-contained male body, and instead an acceptance of what has commonly been defined

as a penetrable, even leaky, female body (1999a, 178-9). In *Crash*, the wound that reveals the inside is evidently comparable to a feminization of the body. Furthermore, it conforms to customary descriptions of the female body via its abject interior and its unclean fluidity. But as well as the open cut, the scar seals up the inside; the injury site is bisexual, switching from gaping female to nodular male. The consequence is an interchangeability that is displayed in the free-flowing sexual engagements.

In addition to bisexuality, the wound facilitates oscillations in gender roles. Mirroring BDSM patterns, power is not fixed with one party but is negotiated and in a state of flux. There is no top or bottom in the relationships if everyone penetrates and is penetrated. The wound makes sex potentially polymorphous, and yet, this is not what happens in *Crash*. In spite of being couched in these terms, what transpires is a flirtatious homoeroticism hidden behind the scar and propped up by traditional sexual differences. Far from liberating gender opportunities, the control of the body through refigurement, with the universal experiences of pleasure and pain, mostly reinforces normalized gender divides.

The wound, although bringing to mind and inviting penetration, is not used in this way in the male body. James's leg, which must have been a gaping chasm when smashed in the car crash, is seen for the first time when it has been firmly closed, and held together by screws, bolts and tubular reinforcement (see figure 3.13). In close-up, tight stitching further secures the integrity of the body by sealing the leg with an unyielding seam. The imagery is in marked contrast to that of Gabrielle's gashed thigh. Only protected by a Velcro strap and the flimsy mesh of her fishnet pantyhose, which James easily tears aside, the wound is a facsimile of a vaginal opening, complete with scar tissue labia and nodular clitoris (figure 3.19). It is no surprise that this pseudo-genital organ is Ballard's (and Gabrielle's) preferred site for penetration.

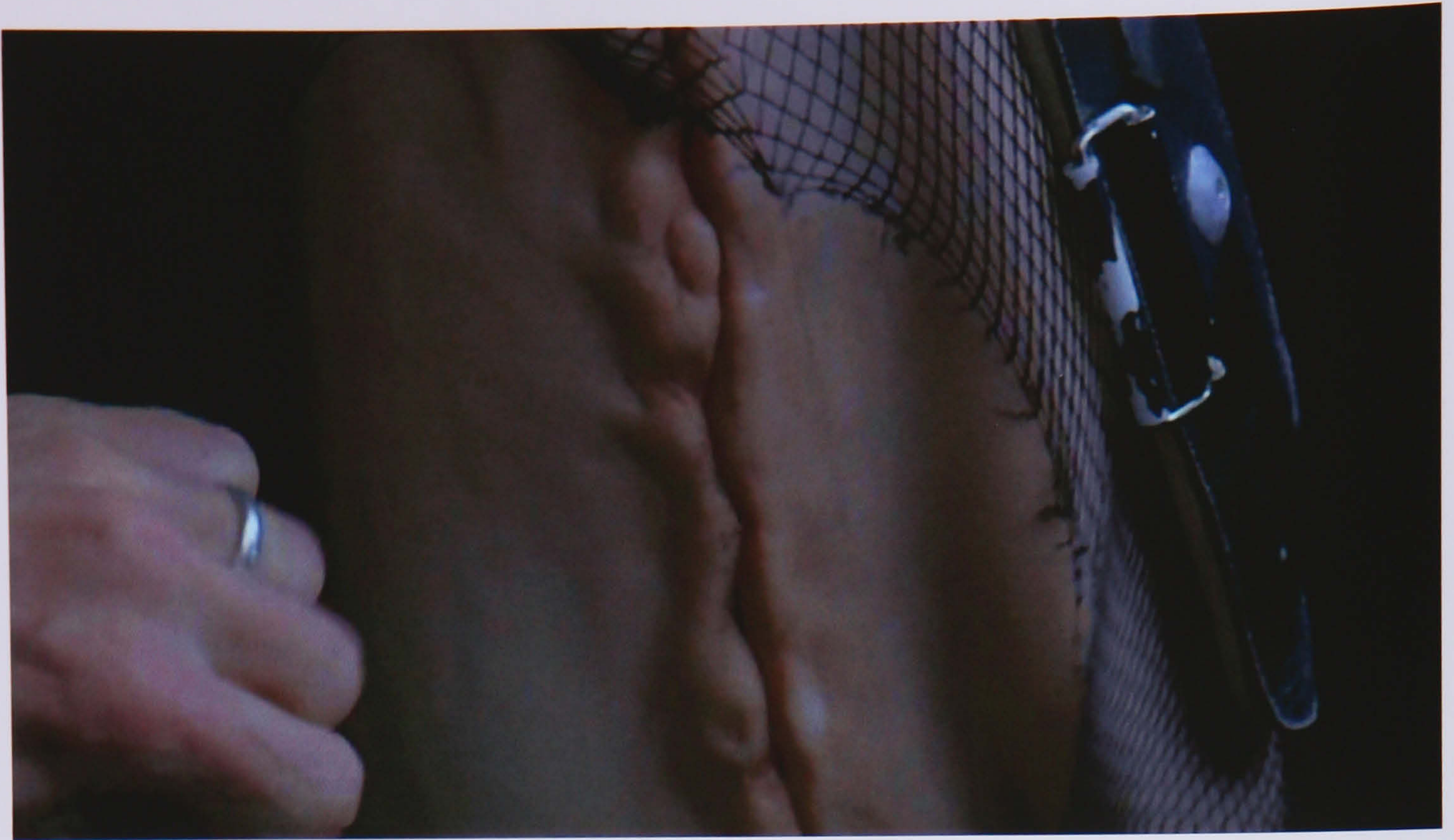


Figure 3.19 Scar as pseudo-genital organ in *Crash*

Even the rigidity of Gabrielle's callipers is surmounted, and ultimately increases her penetrability and passivity by fixing her leg vertically, and allowing easier access to both genital and pseudo-genital organs. The only difficulty the pair experience is the restrictions of the car's interior. Making out in a car has always been fraught with negotiating gearshifts, but here there is the added difficulty of Gabrielle's adaptations for her disability. The mechanics of the control levers amount to a simplistic metaphor for the mechanics of Gabrielle's unusual body. Transposed from the tubular structure that had defined Ballard's male body as impenetrable, these metallic bars stress Gabrielle's open female body, and link it to disability: a rationale that in no way threatens binary stereotypes. Furthermore, the sex scene is one of the very few in the entire film that has the participants facing each other during intercourse. Consequently, the allusion to traditional sexual roles is made even more apparent.

But what is most striking about the whole film in terms of gender divisions is that no man is penetrated by a woman. Although no woman has a scarred phallic

protuberance, Gabrielle's walking stick is designed for such a role.⁴⁰ Yet, no scar or anus is breached by Gabrielle's aid or any other prosthesis. In addition, homosexual penetration is limited to Ballard discretely having sex with Vaughan. Roy Grundmann (1997, 27) makes a similar observation, arguing it reflects the logic that the male protagonist cannot be penetrated, and that Ballard's sex with Vaughan is no more than an act of slumming. Further, he believes it is the penetration of Vaughan that in part necessitates his dying. It is as if physical integrity is required for male integrity.

Grundmann does have compelling corroborating evidence for such negativity, in that *Crash* is saturated with homoeroticism, yet homosexuality and bisexuality are largely withheld. Thus, we have Vaughan lusting over Ballard's scarred body in the hospital, and most sex acts are either anal or rear-entry. Moreover, the scene in which Ballard has sex with Catherine from behind whilst she asks him if he would like to sodomize Vaughan explicitly makes the female body a surrogate for the male. Further, the handling of the sex between Ballard and Vaughan seems coy, with its choice of long shots, dim lighting, tracking shots that disappear behind barriers, and low angles preventing seeing into the car. For Grundmann, this amounts to a reactionary response to the threat of male homosexuality.

Convenient though this explanation is, it fails to explain Cronenberg's anecdotal comment that men often leave the cinema feeling betrayed because the heterosexual stud that Ballard incarnates has proceeded to have sex with another man (in Shelley 1996, 15). Furthermore, Grundmann, although rightly arguing that the lesbian scene between Helen and Gabrielle is depicted more voyeuristically than the homosexual one, fails to mention that it is far from explicit and comes across as 'completely

⁴⁰ The male body is penetrated by a woman wielding a phallic object in Cronenberg's earlier film *Rabid* (Canada, 1976) and his later film *eXistenZ* (UK/Canada, 1999). The latter film has the insertion of a bodyport into the spine (to enable the playing of virtual reality games) in a process that has a specific tone of body piercing.

tokenistic' (Creed 1998, 178). In fact, although Ballard's sexual denouement with Vaughan is motivated by preceding events, both same-sex couplings are percolated with artifice because of their shot selection, isolation within the narrative and their brevity. We should also note that in contrast to the sensuality of the wounds in the film, these moments appear to be numbed of sensation. Vaughan's ramming of the wrecked car Ballard sits in after they have made love reasserts the superiority of the battering assault over the sexual exchange. Variations in sexual orientation are therefore just as dull as being straight; sex can never match the sensual and sensorial intensity of the wound, and the exquisite pain of the refigured body.

Crash certainly fails to evoke a utopia founded on polymorphic sexuality, but this is not its aim. The sexual climax is no more than the bland 'all right' phrase that characters use throughout the film after sex, car smashes and drug-like fixes extracted from videotaped crash tests. The pursuit of pleasure through sexual variations and permutations is reduced to a reflex response, and the ensuing climax is negated to the point of being an involuntary twitch. *Crash* is investigating the potential for other bodily pleasures based upon the corporeal body. Scars and cuts slip from the restraints of deformity into additional erogenous zones that complicate rather than resolve notions of sexuality and pleasure/pain.

It would be more politically challenging if *Crash* demonstrated that refigurement completely redefined sexual identity, and allowed a free-flowing exchange of gender roles, but instead it assails another culturally entrenched opinion. By expressing an interest in refigurement, *Crash* asks how we understand disfigurement and pain. By embracing both as difference amidst the uniformity of dulled sexual experimentation, *Crash* is articulating Vaughan's project, which is about having a different relationship with our bodies. A product of this is an oblique confrontation of the sexuality of people with disabilities: both recognizing their ability to be sexual

beings, and acknowledging the voyeuristic impulse they prompt for many able-bodied spectators. But being defined by a disability is not the same as defining yourself by your refigurement. The difference of course is possessing control of the body. The characters in *Crash* exercise this luxury, and it is the source of the pleasure of the wound. Creating the pain is a mastery of the body, just as the scar is a conscious control through the moulding of the body. The pleasure for the spectator is trying to imagine what it feels like, but not really wanting to feel it. This need to know but not wanting to know is the same as the half-glanced look at Gabrielle's scar that the car salesman is compelled to repeat. In the next chapter, we will see how the need to look at the aestheticized spectacle of the controlled body becomes a structuring feature in some films. But for the characters in *Crash*, the compulsion is to feel. It is only through sensations that they can confirm their existence. Unlike *Tattoo* and *Strangeland*, *Crash* does not depict genuine body modification pursuits, yet in many ways it is closer to their essence. To make the subject cinematic, it reinterprets body modification; but whereas *Boxing Helena* distorts contemporary cultural meanings into sadistic domination, *Crash* retains many of its pleasures, aims and applications. Thus, it is sensual and sexual, spiritual and personal, and consensual and affirmative, and it showcases the marking of the body as a means of control.

4. The Cinematic Art of Serial Killers

[T]here was something artificial about it. Like posed. She was on display.

Detective Monahan (Holly Hunter) describing a crime scene replicating that of the Hillside Strangler in *Copycat* (Jon Amiel, USA, 1995)

In respect of BDSM in Chapter 2, and body modification in Chapter 3, we witnessed that the controlled body has been aestheticized in numerous films in the last twenty years or so. However, although the films in each chapter were respectively united by themes of marking and controlling the body, and the concomitant pleasure in pain, there was no cohesive genre. For the current chapter though, a sufficiently large mass of films exists to define a subgenre. But, unlike the BDSM of *Sick*, or the body modifications of *Crash*, all films in this chapter display no sense of consensual pleasure, for the controlled body in question is the victim of the serial killer. The pleasure of the controlled body is thus primarily directed at the spectator. And yet, an impression of gratification remains within the text, for in a group of serial killer films, a bound and gashed body is not enough to insist upon the murderer's control. Instead, the creatively staged death scene suggests utter subjection and domination, but also a pleasure in the macabre beauty of the tormented body. To achieve the dual result, the films plunder the current interest in the corporeal human form. Indeed, Mark Seltzer has categorized the serial killer as part of the contemporary 'wound culture': a society fascinated by the torn and open body, where damage and trauma are 'badges of identity' (1998, 2), and people grapple with the relationship between inside and outside, public and private. In such a culture, the serial killer, especially when cinematically conceived of via the reified form of the posed victim, can feature alongside the consensual worlds of BDSM and body modification, for all three deal with the controlled body that fuses pleasure and pain.

The Death of Dying, and the Rebirth of the Dead

In 1986, Pete Boss declared in *Screen* that: 'For death in the contemporary horror film to occur offscreen would be almost unthinkable, it would miss the point' (16). Boss rightly identifies the cinematic focus at that time, namely, what Isabel Pinedo calls the 'Spectacle of the Wet Death' (1997, 51). The concentration on the visibility of dying reached its zenith in the slasher films of the 1970s and early 1980s. Through their marauding serial killers, they displayed increasing body counts in successive sequels, with evermore-contrived implements and settings. In addition, and Boss's primary concern, the fear of modern medicine depicted in films such as *Coma* (Michael Crichton, USA, 1978) and *The Dead Zone* (David Cronenberg, USA, 1983), brought anatomical detail to the fore. In both instances, the visceral, the skeletal and the sanguine vividly exposed the fragility of the body as it was destroyed. Philip Brophy constitutes the style as a 'mode of *showing* as opposed to *telling*' (1986, 8), and Pinedo (1997, 51-68) clarifies the relationship between seeing and not-seeing, proposing a combination of glimpses, expectations and looking away. But her premise still orientates around the need to see the act of devastation.

Whenever art is discussed alongside such horror films, it is usually applied to the ability to show gore in its visceral detail. The emblematic spectacles of destruction in *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, USA, 1973), *Dawn of the Dead* (George A. Romero, USA, 1979) and *Scanners* (David Cronenberg, Canada, 1980) have become immortalized in fanzines such as *Fangoria* and *Cinefantastique*, and made cult celebrities of the special effects artists Dick Smith and Tom Savini. The ruined body is therefore regarded as art, but in terms of the filmmaker's talent, not the artistry within the narrative.

Alongside the fandom based on how the spectacle is created, the characters responsible have cult followings, especially those in the slasher films. Although the

‘Final Girl’ (Clover 1992) forms part of the equation, and sometimes appears in sequels, the serial killer is the consistent factor and point of identification in the series. For dedicated fans, there is a pleasure in the craft of the serial killer character: he (and occasionally she) is someone who will dispatch the victim efficiently, sometimes eloquently, and even with a flair for diversity, although never in a manner that can genuinely be called artistic. In place of art, there is eccentricity and occasional witticisms, so it is the serial killer rather than his work that is celebrated.¹

More recently, especially from the mid 1990s onwards, but with highly notable and influential precursors, the emphasis on the serial killer and his crimes has shifted. Body horror persists, but in a distinctly different manner. Creative deaths also abound, but these carnal spectacles are no longer isolated as the imaginative attractions produced by the special effects artists; they now form a significant part of the narrative structure, for the artistic offerings are the signatures of the multiple murderers. Furthermore, the spectacle of the wet death is marginalized or completely removed in favour of the tableaux of the dead, where the body is aesthetically displayed.

In David Fincher’s *Se7en*, made in the US in 1995, a series of murder scenes are based on the seven deadly sins; in *The Bone Collector*, directed by Phillip Noyce four years later, a serial killer stages deaths in the manner of crimes illustrated in a pulp fiction book; and in Russell Mulcahy’s *Resurrection*, also from 1999, posed, mutilated bodies are only steps to produce a work of art composed of the missing body parts. In all three films, the serial killer has an elaborate plan that is visualized in the overt placement of the body within a staged crime setting. In FBI parlance, these would fit into the category of Organized Killer, for each crime scene proclaims

¹ The status of the various killers was such that a proliferation of merchandise appeared based upon them, the most conspicuous of which was in respect of Freddy Krueger, with dolls and gloves based on his character, and a television spin-off for Robert Englund who played him.

‘a murder planned well in advance, reflecting the killer’s overall control of his environment’ (Newton 2000, 179). Furthermore, they correspond to how such a killer ‘may personalize the victim through controlled (even scripted) conversation, thus feeding the ritualistic fantasies that dominate his life’ (Newton 2000, 179).

That the term Organized Killer is in public circulation beyond that of the law enforcement agencies is testament to the vast media coverage serial murder has experienced.² In particular, the novels of Thomas Harris featuring Hannibal Lecter, and the memoirs of former FBI Behavioural Science Unit employees Robert K. Ressler and John E. Douglas, have captured the public’s attention.³ The figure of the profiler (someone who examines crime scene evidence to deduce/predict character traits of the perpetrator) has been picked up by Hollywood, and placed in a battle of wits against the creative genius of the serial killer. Where the slasher film foregrounded the killer and the Final Girl in a battle of speed and resourcefulness as one pursued the other,⁴ the subgenre of artistic serial killer concentrates on the mental pursuit by the profiler, whereby the killer might remain anonymous for much of the film. However, the films do not merely return to the familiar pattern of a whodunit, where the detective identifies clues accidentally left by the killer and solves the mystery of what linked the victim to the murderer, for the nature of the crime has changed. Neither the chase nor the detection is the primary narrative drive (although both may feature); the clues are now deliberately marked at the crime scene, most especially on the body of the victim, and the challenge is to read these clues, for the mutilated body is the language of control and suffering. Writing in the FBI journal *Law Enforcement Bulletin* in respect of actual murder sites, John E. Douglas and Corrine Munn (1992) confirm the current thinking that there exists a

² For example, Ressler and Shachtman 1992, Schechter and Everitt 1996 and Simpson 2000.

³ John E. Douglas has frequently been seen as the model for Jack Crawford in Harris’s books.

⁴ One immediately thinks of the traps deployed by Nancy (Heather Langenkamp) in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, USA, 1984).

dialogue between the investigator and killer by stating, 'Most crime scenes tell a story.' Because of the general acceptance of the murder site functioning as a narrative, the films operate within discourses of art and intellect: a battle of great minds and aesthetic challenges.

The metafiction formation stresses the notion of the controlled body, for as Ressler and Shachtman note, 'Control is of the essence for the organized offender, and law-enforcement personnel learn to look for control as an element in every facet of the crime' (1992, 140). To articulate the control, both over the victim and the investigation, expressly the battle for intellectual superiority between the killer and the profiler (or substitute profiler such as the forensic psychologist in *Kiss the Girls* (Gary Fleder, USA, 1997), the leading criminologist in *The Bone Collector*, the criminology students in *Ripper* (John E. Eyres, Canada, 2001) and the uniquely perceptive seasoned detective in *Se7en* and *Resurrection*), a change in the narrative emphasis needed to take place. Unless the profiler witnessed every crime, the serial killer's control over the victim (and the investigation) would be much less evident to him or her. However, by staging the death scene, the killer articulates his control to the profiler. Thus, where the slasher films had concentrated on the *modus operandi* of the killer, in other words, the very acts that enable the crime to be completed, the murders of the artistic killer subgenre are investigated via Signature Behaviour. The signature or "calling card" as Douglas and Munn (1992) call it, is any activity engaged in at the crime scene that is not necessary for the successful completion of the offence (Cooley, 2000), for example using a prepared script with the victim. Committing these additional acts, especially the decidedly sophisticated ones depicted in the films, deploys evidence of the serial killer's planning, mastery of the victim, and ability to compose the crime scene at his leisure. Further, the placement of clues to solve the crime, and to suggest seriality (e.g. the seven deadly sins motif

in *Se7en* defines there will be more than one), is a defiant challenge to the killer's pursuer to try to catch him by deciphering the evidence. The staging and structuring therefore makes the serial killer both artist and narrator.

The following films all feature integral moments of artistry as the body, or murder scene, is deliberately displayed: *Blowback*, *The Bone Collector*, *Bone Daddy* (Mario Azzopardi, USA/Canada, 1998), *Copycat*, *Hannibal* (Ridley Scott, USA, 2001), *Kiss the Girls*, *Manhunter* (Michael Mann, USA, 1986), *Misteria/Body Puzzle* (Lamberto Bava, Italy, 1991), *Red Dragon* (Brett Ratner, USA/Germany, 2002), *Resurrection*, *Ripper*, *Se7en*, *The Silence of the Lambs* and *White of the Eye* (Donald Cammell, UK, 1987), as do the British television dramas *Messiah* (2001), *Messiah II: Vengeance is Mine* (2003) and *Outside the Rules* (2002). It is noteworthy that only one, *White of the Eye*, predates the first two cinematic depictions of Thomas Harris's characterization Hannibal Lecter (*Manhunter* and *The Silence of the Lambs*).⁵ Indeed, many of the ideas employed by Harris structure the subgenre, but for the moment, the key issue is that a distinct subgenre exists in which the killer is promoted as didactic artist.

Some of the films do not utilize all the attributes of the subgenre. *Bone Daddy* features former medical examiner William Palmer (Rutger Hauer), who, after developing his memoirs of a serial killer into novel, in which he conveniently changes the ending so that the murderer is caught, is hounded by the reappearance of the killer. After his literary agent goes missing, Palmer is sent pieces of bone from the living victim: a direct reference to the earlier crimes where only body parts were

⁵ It should be noted that, of course, not all serial killer films after *Manhunter* exhibit the formal and narrative traits of the artistic serial killer subgenre. For example, *Blue Steel* (Kathryn Bigelow, USA, 1990) features clues in the form of bullets with a name on them, but contains no sense of artistry. Similarly, *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, although beginning with a series of scenes showing the tranquil aftermath of murders, has a soundtrack that carries the murders happening in a temporal disjuncture. Furthermore, the remainder of the film is quite explicit, both in respect of watching the murders happen and in their haphazard and mundane nature.

found. Although no tableaux of death are discovered, the fragmented body is set, quite literally, amidst the creative work of the novelist, for bloody bones are posed amidst the words of the book. Furthermore, the battle of wits between killer and novelist is played out via the former sending the latter false clues, the game structure of which is foregrounded by William Palmer's visits to a bar to play chess. A character may warn that you should 'count less on life imitating art and more on hard evidence', but it is art nonetheless that holds sway for much of the film.

Through examining the visual flourishes of the posed body, the coded messages and the art of the serial killer, I will be asking the following questions of the subgenre. What cultural context might the artistic serial killer originate from? What principles of representation are discernable from articulating control via the posed dead body? What might the implications be for having the serial killer become an artist? What happens to the spectacle when it becomes part of the narrative structure? And does death as tableaux deny the victim's pain or is the confrontation of suffering the price we pay for information?

Serial Killers and Artistry

For the purposes of my study, I am concisely defining serial killing as two or more separate murders with an emotional cooling-off period between each one.⁶ Serial killing is frequently categorized as a product of the modern age; the anonymity of the metropolis, the loss of community, the breakdown of the family unit, the speed and breadth of travel, and the regimentation of working life are all regarded as causal agents. In essence, the alienation of the individual and the tedium of existence in a mechanical/technological age are seen to spawn the new breed of killer. Such an

⁶ The FBI has a more elaborate set of criteria including the need for 3 or more separate murders, as well as requiring the deaths to take place at discrete locations (a condition that would bizarrely remove Dennis Nilsen from the category).

interpretation prompted Thomas De Quincey to describe the excitement of murder as being ‘a condiment for seasoning the insipid monotonies of daily life’ (De Quincey 1897c, 96). In addition to being symptomatic of modernity, the serial killer is regarded as a synecdoche for the fears of contemporary society. The convenience of the equation is the provision of a figure of ‘evil’ that most of society can unite against (Philip Jenkins in Simpson 2000, 7). However, the serial killer is inherently contradictory, for the reviled murderer is simultaneously a source of pleasure as an object of fascination, and a veritable celebrity, where the more diabolic the crime, the greater the fame.

Richard Dyer has indicated how apposite the structure of serial killing is to modern life, for although seriality has always been a feature of storytelling, ‘it is only under capitalism that seriality became a reigning principle of cultural production, starting with the serialisation of novels and cartoons, then spreading to news and movie programming’ (1997, 14). Such media is defined by both repetition and anticipation. Dyer argues that, comparably, serial murders are ‘each a variation and continuation of those before, each an episode in a serial’ (1997, 14). Robert K. Ressler has, perhaps unknowingly, made a similar argument when he falsely claimed the credit for inventing the term serial killer.⁷ Acknowledging the appellation expresses crimes committed in a series, he claims that:

what was also in my mind were the serial adventures we used to see on Saturday at the movies.... Each week, you’d be lured back to see another episode, because at the end of each one there was a cliff-hanger. In dramatic terms, this wasn’t a satisfactory ending, because it increased, not lessened the tension. The same dissatisfaction occurs in the minds of serial killers. (Ressler and Shachtman 1992, 35)⁸

⁷ The term ‘serial murderer’ is said to have first appeared in print in 1966 in John Brophy’s *The Meaning of Murder* (Newton 2000, 205).

⁸ That we once more find a reference to the cliffhanger indicates its enduring quality (and quality of endurance), but also confirms the interrelationship between these serial killer films and the other cinematic representations of the controlled body discussed in the thesis.

Dyer also pinpoints a peculiarly fictional application of seriality: alongside the pleasure of anticipation and suspense via repetition, there is gratification from discerning an overall pattern to the series (1997, 16). The construction and revelation of the sequence is the culmination of the series, and gives greater credence to the serial killer being a forward-thinking conceptual artist. In the films *Se7en*, *Copycat*, *The Bone Collector* and *Resurrection*, as well as the British television drama *Messiah*, the meaning and creative composition is more than the sum of each of the artistically displayed murder scenes. What are produced are murder instalments that make a feature out of their very seriality. In effect, the murder scenes are enjoyed as conceptual art, for the conceptual artist throws into confusion the conventions of aesthetic communication, a charge that is also appropriate for the assertion of murder as art.

That some films should choose to equate the serial killer with the artist should come as no surprise. Thomas De Quincey, in ‘On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts: First Paper’, originally published in 1827, argues that:

Murder ... may be laid hold of by its moral handle (as it generally is in the pulpit and at the Old Bailey), and *that*, I confess, is its weak side; or it may be treated *aesthetically*, ... that is, in relation to good taste. (De Quincey 1897a, 13)

De Quincey suggests that for ‘the composition of a fine murder’ (1897a, 12) you require ‘Design, ... grouping, light and shade, poetry, [and] sentiment’ (1897a, 12). He points towards appreciation of the complexity and originality of murder beyond the scope of moral indignation. Rejecting the ‘gaudy display’ of copious blood enjoyed by the general populace, De Quincey condescendingly contends ‘the enlightened connoisseur is more refined in his taste’ (1897a, 48). The stance correlates to the rejection of the stalk-and-slash films of the 1970s and the critical acclaim lauded upon *The Silence of the Lambs*, which Yvonne Tasker has likened to

‘arty slasher’ (2002, 32).

Of course, the conjunction of beauty and the horrific does not begin with De Quincey. English Gothic literature featured it strongly, and influenced the style and imagery of countless serial killer movies. Philip L. Simpson has attested that, ‘The earliest recognizable literary breeding ground for what would become the serial killer fictional narrative is the Gothic tradition’ (2000, 26). Similarly, Michel Foucault identifies the late eighteenth century as a time when ‘a whole new literature of crime developed: a literature in which crime is glorified, because it is one of the fine arts’ (1991, 68).⁹

But the written word has persistently looked towards the visual arts to venerate the beauty of death. A graphic example occurs in Charles Robert Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer*, which has the description of a blood-drained body being ‘worthy of the pencil of a Murillo, a Rosa, or any of those painters, who, inspired by the genius of suffering, delight in representing the most exquisite of human forms in the extremity of human agony’ (in Praz 1970, 122). Alain Robbe-Grillet’s short story ‘The Secret Room’ (1965a) makes the association more vehemently. Describing in detail a naked woman’s murdered body, the crime scene, and the fleeing killer, the tale only reveals in its very last phrase that the account is of a painting.

The recourse to the visual arts is understandable. The beautification of the horrific is evident in such diverse works of art as the fantasy worlds of Hieronymus Bosch, the painfully detailed religious imagery of Grünewald, and the animal slaughter and ritual crucifixions of Hermann Nitsch’s events with the Viennese Actionists. These, and many other works, are a pictorial version of De Quincey’s

⁹ Like the Gothic novel before it, the Gothic film frequently draws on the artist and the link between the horrific and fine art. Thus, the ancestral paintings with their sense of foreboding feature in *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1940) and *Dragonwyck* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, USA, 1946), whilst the painting literally contains the horrific in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Albert Lewin, USA, 1945).

belief in the aesthetics of murder.

The artist is further linked to the criminal by being an outsider. Wayne J. Douglass in 'The Criminal Psychopath as Hollywood Hero' sees the psychopath as 'the logical successor to the gangster as criminal hero' with both trying 'to emerge from the anonymous crowd, to assert their identity through violent, anti-social behavior' (1981, 32). The defining difference though is that whilst the gangster seeks material gain, the psychopath, like the stereotypical artist, rejects it in favour of emotional euphoria. Developing as the heroic protagonist via Cody Jarrett in *White Heat* (Raoul Walsh, USA, 1949), Scorpio in *Dirty Harry* (Don Siegel, USA, 1971) and Kit Carson in *Badlands* (Terrence Malick, USA, 1973), the psychopath evolved into the artistic serial killer, where the murderer may be psychopathic, psychotic, or potentially just evil. But in the artistic serial killer incarnations, the correlation to the artist is extended, so that the murderer now claims the artist's assumed capacity to speak a truth that others cannot or will not see.

In the serial killer films that comprise my study, the murder forms part of the artistic project. Art as a by-product of, or as a disguise for murder (and murder as a by-product of art) do not fall into my remit. Thus, *Mystery of the Wax Museum* (Michael Curtiz, USA, 1933), and the remake, *House of Wax* (André de Toth, USA, 1953), are not examples of what I would define as the artistic killer. In both films, a sculptor's wax figures are destined for the Royal Academy. But when his lifetime's work is destroyed in a fire, he replaces them with wax-dipped humans. Comparably, Walter Paisley (Dick Miller) in *A Bucket of Blood* (Roger Corman, USA, 1959), who embalms his victims in clay, does so not to exhibit their deaths, but to hide them.¹⁰ More recently, *Anatomie/Anatomy* (Stefan Ruzowitzky, Germany, 2000) has

¹⁰ The same is true of his namesake played by Anthony Michael Hall in the remake *Bucket of Blood* (Michael J. McDonald, USA, 1995). Made in the middle of the period defined by the films I am investigating, it is surprising that this film remains so faithful to the original story.

displayed the dead as art, but again away from the context of killing and the crime scene.

Other films have interpreted the act of killing via art. *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, UK, 1960), the cult status of which Peter Wollen attributes to its ‘aestheticisation of death’ (1994, 20), features a scopophilic cinematographer who films the reactions of his victims as they watch their own deaths. The instrument of artistry actually achieves the death: a spike on the camera’s tripod. A more ostentatious series of deaths occurs in *Theatre of Blood* (Douglas Hickox, UK, 1973). A second-rate Shakespearean actor, Edward Lionheart (Vincent Price) avenges his failure to win the Critics Circle award by killing each voting critic in the manner of the Shakespeare play they issued his bad review for. Consequently, we have the eating of children (surrogate ones in the form of two poodles) from *Titus Andronicus*, which extends into force-feeding to death; a man’s murder of his wife, whom he falsely accuses of adultery as in *Othello*; and the removal of a heart to represent the pound of flesh from *The Merchant of Venice*. These three murders, not dissimilar to the deadly sin murders of Gluttony, Lust and Greed in *Se7en*,¹¹ are solved, as are the others, by the sole remaining critic from the circle. It should not go unnoticed that it is a critic who interprets the crime scenes, for the role of evaluator has great pertinence for the type of investigation required for the serial killer artist.

In an essay that has productively begun to chart the serial killer aesthete, Steven Jay Schneider sets up a primitive taxonomy that differentiates between films that ‘showcase murder as an artistic product’ and those that ‘showcase it as an artistic performance’ (2001, 71). Acknowledging that they are not mutually exclusive, he situates *Peeping Tom* and *Theatre of Blood* in the latter category. Inadequately

¹¹ A similar film with Vincent Price, *The Abominable Dr Phibes* (Robert Fuest, UK, 1971), which features deaths in the manner of the ten deadly plagues, has also been compared with *Se7en* (see David Kalat in Schneider, 2001, 84 n. 7).

though, Schneider appears content with a superficial examination of whether or not the elements exist in the films, rather than any analysis of how the artistry relates to the narrative. Schneider therefore also locates the slasher films *Friday the 13th* (Sean S. Cunningham, USA, 1980) and *Halloween II* (Rick Rosenthal, USA, 1981) in the category of artistic performance, even though the artistry is primarily associated with the production team of writer, director and special effects person, rather than the creative force of the dumb killer.

Equally opaque in reasoning is the inclusion of *Scream* (Wes Craven, USA, 1996) and *Urban Legend* (Jamie Blanks, USA, 1998), the murder scenes in which would appear to have little relationship to a conscious act of aestheticization, being simple facsimiles, and often marginalized by bland axe-wielding stalk-and-slash deaths. For something to be art, there must be an intention of display, either of the performance or the finished effect. Without intent, it becomes aesthetic at best. Furthermore, self-reflexivity does not in itself constitute art. The serial killer in *Copycat*, notwithstanding the title suggesting plain imitation, has originality, and therefore deserves to be in the classification. Besides replicating both the *modus operandi* and signatures of famous serial killers (Albert DeSalvo, Kenneth Bianchi and Angelo Buono, Jeffrey Dahmer and Ted Bundy), the copycat killer, Peter Foley (William McNamara), has an overarching schemata organized not on chronology or alphabetical order, but on the sequence the serial killers were mentioned in the lecture given by criminal psychologist Helen Hudson (Sigourney Weaver). To enhance the artistry, the final serial killer linked to Helen is the serial killer who attempted to kill her on the day of her lecture. The copycat killer wishes to do more than replicate him, for he wishes to succeed in killing her.¹² Further, Foley's

¹² As Richard Dyer adroitly points out though, the film 'wants to repeat *itself*, so this killing too must only be an attempted one, bringing the film to a perfect formal closure' (1997, 16).

deliberate recreation of the crime scene, by placing Helen's shoe on the floor as she hangs from a noose in the public toilets, shows an aesthete's eye for detail.

I would also contest the simplicity of Schneider's other category, artistic products. Films like *Se7en*, *The Bone Collector* and *Resurrection* are very different to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, USA, 1974), which Schneider includes with *Se7en* in the grouping of artistic product. *Deranged* (Jeff Gillen and Alan Ormsby, USA, 1974), like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, is based on the real serial killer Ed Gein, and has the killer fashioning objects out of victims' bodies. Removed from the crime scene, these are *personal* souvenirs, which take pride of place in the murderer's home.¹³ As art objects, they perform a completely discrete function to the artistic tableaux of the crime scenes in the films of my study. As Frank Zito (Joe Spinell) says in *Maniac!* (William Lustig, USA, 1980), another film about a serial killer who collects grisly souvenirs (scalps of women), 'In a painting or a picture they're yours forever.' The objective of souvenir art is possession; in contrast, films like *Se7en*, with their art of the crime scene, are about displaying control, creativity and genius. The two categories are quite separate, and best not classified together.

Even *The Driller Killer* (Abel Ferrara, USA, 1979), where an artist becomes a serial killer when he suffers a creative block, does not advocate the crime scene as art. But traces of the murder scene as art can be discerned in films that do not foreground it. In police stations and FBI offices in numerous films, the pin board of photographs of murder scenes and bodies form macabre galleries. Usually only glimpsed in the background, films in the subgenre of artistic killers sometimes turn them into veritable features. A primary example would be the display in Jack

¹³ I use the term souvenir to refer to objects used to supplement the killer's fantasies, as opposed to trophies, which commemorate the kill.

Crawford's office in *The Silence of the Lambs*, with the prominent wording of 'Bill Skins Fifth' (figure 4.1). Do we not, like Clarice (Jodie Foster), strain our eyes to catch sight of the photographically composed images of the bodies? In *Hannibal* too, a wall is awash with murder scenes from across Europe, and in *Copycat*, Foley has his own private collection, including both victims and his pursuer Helen Hudson, who notes she is the 'pin-up girl' of serial killers (figure 4.2).

Where might the inspiration for the current cinematic deployment of murder scene art emanate? It certainly seems true that serial killers have 'signatures' or 'calling cards' for their murders, a point apparently not lost on the makers of *American Psycho* (Mary Harron, USA/Canada, 2000), where the serial killer or maybe only fantasizing doodler, Patrick Bateman (Christian Bale), takes part in a game of one-upmanship based upon business calling cards. As we have seen with the recent Washington Sniper, the signature may involve taunting notes and tarot cards left at the scene.¹⁴ Others have expressed a greater penchant for aestheticized dressing of the scene. The Boston Strangler created lavish bows from the ligatures around the necks of his posed victims; the Hillside Strangler, actually two killers working together, openly displayed the viciously assaulted victims for the police to find; and the murder scenes associated with Charles Manson had slogans written in blood on the walls and carved into the mutilated body of a victim (Schechter and Everitt 1996; Newton 2000; Fuchs 2002). An American magazine, *Answer Me*, has even printed a list of the top 100 "most creative" murders (Fuchs 2002, 15).

However, most serial killer art does not relate directly to the crime scene. In Los Angeles, the Amok Gallery featured the artwork of Charles Manson and John Gacy; the latter's work is collected by Johnny Depp, Iggy Pop and John Waters, and has

¹⁴ In other more famous cases, the notes have been sent to the police or the press, for example the Jack the Ripper letters.



Figure 4.1 FBI pin board gallery of suffering in *The Silence of the Lambs*



Figure 4.2 Peter Foley's personal gallery of suffering, including Helen Hudson, the 'pin-up girl' of serial killers, in *Copycat*

increased in value since his execution.¹⁵ The cult of the serial killer is sufficiently strong for anything associated with the killer to be collectable. Thus, letters, photographs and signatures of serial killers have all become collectibles, and if the real thing cannot be obtained, a facsimile will do, so serial killers adorn t-shirts and playing cards, and a website allows you to download fonts so you can type in the handwriting style of a killer (Killer Fonts, 1997). *Hannibal*, one of the most recent

¹⁵ For more information on the artwork of serial killers see Schechter and Everitt 1996, 14-17 & 46-47, Newton 2000, 5-7, and Taubin 1991, 16.

films in the subgenre, directly references the trend, with Barney (Frankie R. Faison), the one time jailer of Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins), selling his related ephemera, including a signed copy of *The Joy of Cooking*.¹⁶

Fascination with serial killers is by no means a recent cultural trend. Walter Sickert is said to have been entranced by Jack the Ripper, and painted *The Camden Town Murder (What Shall We Do For the Rent?)* (1908) (figure 4.3). Also in respect of painters, in *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (1995), Maria Tatar notes the artwork of both George Grosz (a man interested in ladykillers) and Otto Dix, whose paintings include *Sexual Murder* (1922) (figure 4.4). The latter is the most interesting for my study, showing the aftermath of the murder, with the body aesthetically displayed for the viewing public. As Tartar explains, during the contemplation of the murder victim, ‘it is easy enough to become transfixed by the sight of a body in the state of biological disintegration’ (1995, 13). However, even whilst we observe the victim, ‘The corpse vanishes as the work of art and its creator enter the foreground to serve as the centre of attention’ (1995, 17). The trait of deflecting the gaze from the victim onto the killer as artist is a trend that runs through the subgenre I am investigating, although, as we shall see, not to the exclusion of suffering. Where the killers in *Mystery of the Wax Museum*, *A Bucket of Blood*, *Deranged* and *Maniac* had wanted control and immortality via the object, the new breed of serial killer wants the same via the artistry. As John Doe (Kevin Spacey) states in *Se7en*, it is what he has *done* that will be ‘puzzled over, and studied, and followed, forever’. Attempting to deny John Doe the status of artist, Detective David Mills (Brad Pitt) declares, ‘You’re no messiah. You’re ... a movie of the week.

¹⁶ A longer scene, eventually cut from the finished version of the film, showed Clarice Starling (Julianne Moore) viewing an eBay auction site of Lecter related goods.



Figure 4.3 *The Camden Town Murder (What Shall We Do For the Rent?)* (1908) by Walter Sickert



Figure 4.4 *Sexual Murder* (1922) by Otto Dix (original in colour)

You're a fucking t-shirt, at best.'¹⁷ But the work is undiminished, for as Chris Pula (head of marketing for the distributor New Line) has asserted of *Se7en*, the 'star of the movie was the crime. Brad and Morgan [Freeman] were the co-stars' (in Dyer 1999, 8).

¹⁷ Similarly, the serial killer in *The Watcher* (Joe Charbanic, USA, 2000) is dismissed with the phrase 'you're paperwork'.

But it would be wrong to interpret the depiction of the artistic serial killer in films as a straight correlation to the celebrity status and idolatry serial killers experience in Western society. In fact, with its fusion of didacticism and corporeality, the art in the aesthetic killer subgenre seems founded on an older tradition that is going through a renaissance: the anatomy artist.

The aesthetically presented corpse has existed as a didactic tool for centuries. The dissection arenas established in the sixteenth century were more than lecture theatres: being open to the public, they offered education and performance. The anatomist and his surroundings were further aestheticized, becoming popular subjects for artists, and more uncannily, his wax models of figures were designed as extremely detailed anatomical exhibits, but within an artistic framework. The pose of Pinson's *Anatomy of a Seated Woman* (late 18th century) (figure 4.5) does not merely offer the most opportune pose to reveal the internal organs; instead, it evokes the murderous attack on an unarmed classical nude.

In contrast to the murder scenes of the serial killer artist, it has traditionally been the criminal not the victim that has been posed. William Pink's *Smugglerius* (1834) (figure 4.6), originally cast from the corpse of a convicted smuggler, and put into the classical statue pose of the *Dying Gaul* before *rigor mortis* set in, remains with the Royal Academy of Arts and featured in the *Spectacular Bodies* exhibition. The acts of flaying and dissection were feared by prisoners on the grounds that a whole body was needed to rise again on the Day of Judgement, so as Caroline Walker Bynum notes of the Medieval period: 'Displaying the bloody fragments of the executed was a way of underlining their eternal damnation' (1991, 280).¹⁸ The two concessions made to taste being, that the bodies be classically posed, and that the criminal would

¹⁸ We cannot dismiss the cultural significance of separating body parts from the remainder of the body as belonging to the historical past. To do so would be to forget the bereaved families whose dead children's body parts were removed without permission at the Alder Hey hospital in England in the 1990s, and their demands for them to be returned to be buried with the remainder of the body.



Figure 4.5 *Anatomy of a Seated Woman* (late 18th century) by André-Pierre Pinson

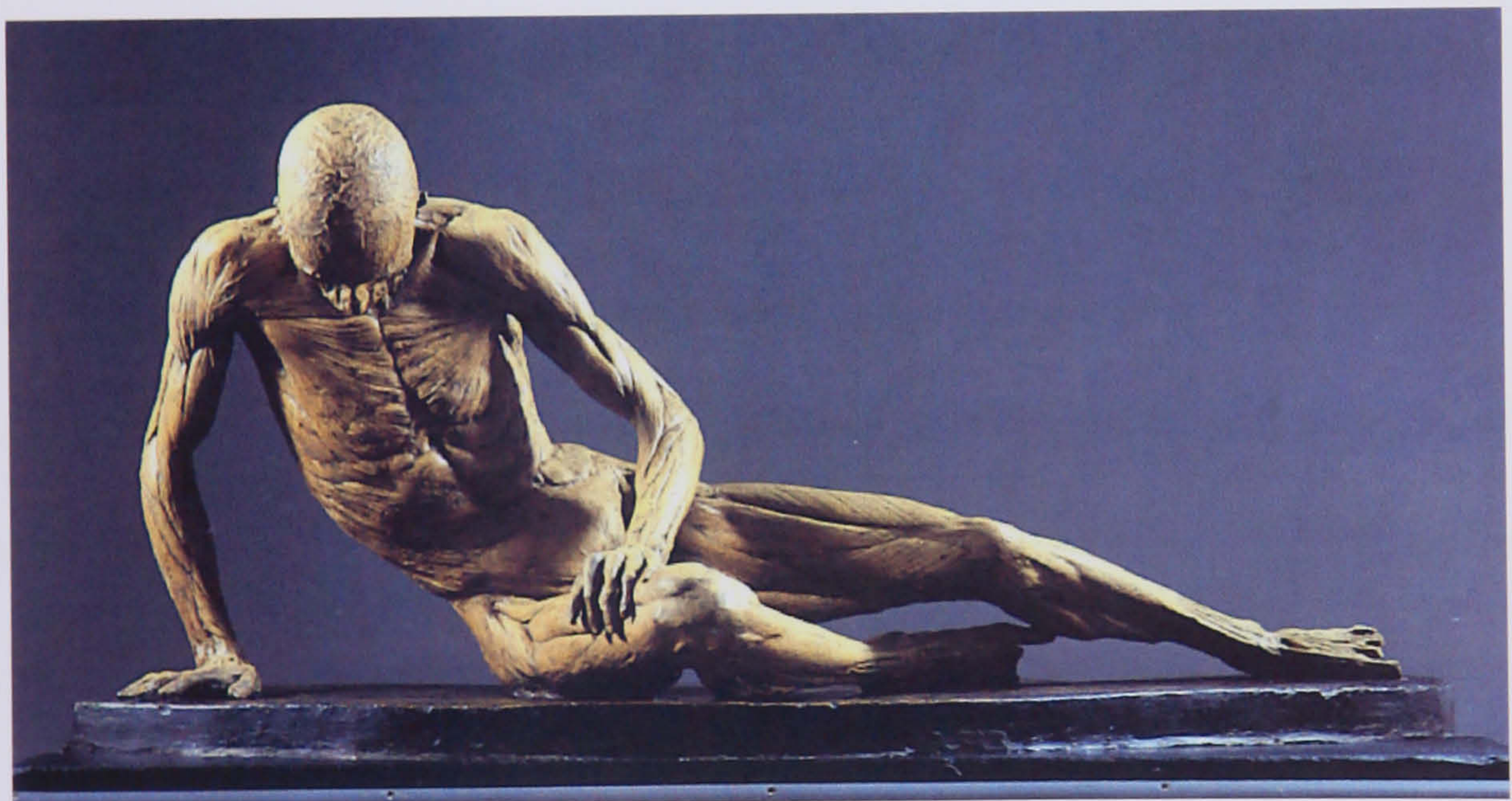


Figure 4.6 *Smugglerius (Écorché of Man in the Pose of the 'Dying Gaul')* by William Pink

not be displayed in his home town. These flayed figures, or écorchés, were considered objects of beauty in their own right, but also served as subjects for drawing classes. Their teaching potential was therefore twofold: do not commit crimes, or you will be damned, and look at the inner beauty of the body. Anatomists and artists were intrinsically united in their charting of the body, with Leonardo da

Vinci confessing to having used at least thirty corpses for his 'life' studies. To this day, the cast of a body of an executed Chelsea pensioner, which was fashioned whilst pliantly warm, still hangs in the life studio of the Royal Academy. Art, suffering and murder are heavily intertwined, even if the notion of the serial killer is more recent.

Gunther von Hagens has (con)fused boundaries of art and anatomy even further. His touring exhibition *Körperwelten* or *Body Worlds*, exhibited in London in 2002-2003, contains actual human bodies, variously flayed, dismembered and disembowelled, but preserved by a process called Plastination. Although debates have raged concerning how von Hagens obtained the bodies,¹⁹ most controversy has orbited around the question of whether it is art. That von Hagens is inspired by high art is clear; he declares of his work that 'the final result must already be in the mind's eye of the anatomist prior to beginning, just as a sculptor has the statue in mind' (2001, 14). Like the photographic work of Muybridge, and Paul Richer and Albert Londe before him, the figures are usually posed as if in action, especially in sporting pursuits (e.g. *The Swimmer*, *The Goalkeeper*, *The Swordsman*).²⁰ More painterly, his *Fragmented Plastinate*, with body organs revealed by drawers and doors in the skin, is reminiscent of Dali's *The Anthropomorphic Cabinet* (1936); *The Chess Player* is said to be based upon a Cezanne; and *The Runner*, a figure displayed with muscles laterally trailing as if the skeleton is travelling at speed (a kind of anatomically winged Mercury), is based on Boccioni's *Prototypes of Movement in Space*

¹⁹ It is alleged that some of the exhibits are the bodies of Siberian peasants and mental patients from Novosibirsk that were taken without permission of relatives. In addition, von Hagens has recently moved his operations to China, and it has been claimed the move was prompted by the ease of obtaining bodies there, rather than because of the financial support the Chinese Government are offering. In von Hagens defence, there would appear no need for such a move now, because his programme of body donations (on dying) has five new people signing up each day. For more details, see Imogen O'Rorke 2001, 5 and the television programme 'A Modern Frankenstein', part 3 of the series *The Anatomists* (2002).

²⁰ Gunther von Hagens's plastinated figures are not dated. The reason for this may be to confer on them a status that falls between art and education, even though they are exhibited in galleries.

(O'Rorke 2001, 5).²¹ Exhibited in galleries, there is no sense of the morgue in the bloodless, odourless world of 'edutainment' (von Hagens in Jeffries 2002, 3), just a tone of the beauty of the biologically mechanical.

But these are not murdered bodies, although the spectre of the Holocaust does pervade the event, with the tattooed epidermis on one exhibit reminding one of Elsa Koch's terror camp designs of lamp shades and gloves from prisoners' skins. As a point of reference too, the serial killer, both factual and fictional, is not far away.²² Ed Gein, the inspiration for *Psycho*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Deranged*, produced clothing, furniture and *objets d'art* from the skin and bones of female bodies, two of whom, he prompted the demise of. Further, Hannibal Lecter's name frequently appears when von Hagens's work is criticized (see Stuttford 2002; Moore 2002).

But what makes von Hagens as indicative of his era as the artistic serial killer is his desire 'to enlighten people by means of aesthetic shock rather than cruelty shock' (in Jeffries 2002, 3): an aspiration that we shall see is consistent with that of the serial killer John Doe in *Se7en*. Both von Hagens and the serial killer aesthete exhibit a renewed interest in the damaged body, one that aims to educate, but which is frequently overlaid with the representation of the past. But for the exquisite artistry and the message embedded within it to be discerned, a mere detective will not do, the investigator has to become commentator.

²¹ O'Rorke appears to be referring to Umberto Boccioni's *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913).

²² A rumour exists that Günter Grass compared von Hagens with Josef Mengele (Jeffries 2002, 3). And as if confirming the circulatory structure of these images, von Hagens's work appears to have influenced Olivier Goulet's *SkinBag*, a collection of clothes and bags designed to look like real skin, which can be personalized with your own tattoo design (SkinBag n.d.). Further, the cinematic quality of von Hagens's work inspired the feature film *Anatomie*. Set in Heidelberg University, where von Hagens perfected his techniques, the film features a secret Anti-Hippocratic Oath society, the members of which believe in the right to sacrifice a few for the benefit of all. By experimenting on the still conscious victims, the members are seen as descendants of the Nazis.

The Serial Killer as Artist, the Investigator as Critic, and the Policeman as Philistine

Alison Young, in her chapter on detective fiction in *Imagining Crime: Textual Outlaws and Criminal Conversations*, identifies two significant strands of representation in detective fiction from the nineteenth century onwards. In one, 'the criminal was romanticized ... as evil beyond redemption or as a rebellious figure' (1996, 84). Thus, the offender was defined as arch villain, as with Moriarty in the Sherlock Holmes stories, or amiable outlaw, as epitomized by Robin Hood. In the other strand, the attitude towards crime went through a process of 'scientization' (1996, 84). Crime was no longer defined as evil, but could be traced to hereditary defects and conditioning. In a period of scientific expansion, including phrenology and rational thinking, the genre produced 'the detective as positivist': a figure able to interpret and solve the crime through observation (1996, 84).

Both strands are pertinent to the artistic killer. Evil is an organizing concept of *Se7en*, and the complementary notions of sin and redemption infuse Fincher's film and the religious iconography and motivations in *Blowback*, *Resurrection* and *Messiah*. But it is the second constituent that is crucial to the subgenre's format. In Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' (1841), which is usually considered to be the first detective story, Monsieur Dupin solves a murder investigation by reading the details in a newspaper and examining the crime scene. For example, from one small piece of ribbon, he deduces that someone involved is a Maltese sailor, and through rational deduction, proves the murderer was an orang-utan. As investigator, Dupin's role is to observe and interpret the signs at the murder scene; and as reader, our pleasure is derived from his deduction of events, and not the crime itself. Coming fourteen years after De Quincey's 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts: First Paper', Poe's story is regarded by Joel Black (1991, 16)

as supplanting the murderer as artist with the detective as artist-hero, and providing the template for the modern genre of detective fiction. However, his model of usurpation appears overly emphatic. Throughout Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's tales of Sherlock Holmes, Moriarty remained the master criminal. As Holmes describes in *The Valley of Fear*: 'There is a master hand here.... You can tell an *old master* by the *sweep of his brush*. I can tell a Moriarty when I see one' (1981, 178; emphasis added). Thus, in one of the most popular detective series of the era, Moriarty was conceived to be an artist, and it therefore suggests that the criminal maestro had not disappeared.

Recognizing the persistence of the criminal as artist does not diminish the role of the investigator. Running parallel to the scientism of observation, rational thought and deduction, was an undercurrent that emphasized an artistry of the investigator that was analogous to the talent and invention of the criminal.²³ In the same Conan Doyle tale, Holmes admits, in respect of his elaborately stylized resolutions of crimes, 'Some touch of the artist wells up within me and calls insistently for a well-staged performance' (1981, 78). Holmes is therefore a transitional stage, not quite aesthete or scientist, but someone who insists on artistry of presentation to embellish crime solving.

The detective's desire to be seen on a par with the creativity of the criminal has graphically resurfaced in the incarnation of profiler. Robert K. Ressler has underlined the importance of interpretation in his work, opposing it to a set of learned criteria, and so proclaims 'profiling remains an art and not a science' (Ressler and Shachtman 1992, 157). Further, with an artist's sensibility, Ressler insists upon not hearing other opinions before viewing the crime scene (1992, 206). Associating himself with the

²³ The failures of such scientific thought as phrenology to identify observable signs of criminality, probably contributed to the need for the additional quality in the investigator.

crime scene, the profiler fears contamination, but where the latter has its basis in the scientific (physical pollution), the former suggests the need for creative independence.

The reciprocity between criminal and investigator has frequently manifested itself in detective narratives in the form of the *doppelgänger*. Memorably, the theme is central to *Manhunter* (and its remake *Red Dragon*), where Will Graham (William Petersen) tries to get inside the mindset of the Tooth Fairy (Tom Noonan) who has been staging his murder victims with pieces of mirrors on their eyes. By mentally lowering his guard, Will replicates the killer's thought process and discovers clues. But in order to reactivate his ability to think the thoughts of the killer, he has to consult with an incarcerated serial murderer, Hannibal Lecter (Brian Cox).²⁴ The meeting leaves Will vulnerable to Lecter entering his own thoughts, and Lecter challenges Will to deny that the only reason he had caught him was that they are 'just alike'.

In other films in the subgenre, the treatment of the *doppelgänger* is more in keeping with the tradition of the detective story *doppelgänger*, with the policeman becoming a criminal. The implication is not the pollution of criminality, but the inadequacies of the legal system, and therefore the necessity to break the law to catch the criminal. Prevalent as these aspects of the doubling are in the artistic serial killer subgenre, the sense of the *doppelgänger* is most strenuous in respect of the investigator's ability to read the killer's work. Consequently, the *mise-en-scene* of the crime scene becomes more than spectacle, for it forms the central puzzle or enigma that structures the narrative. The suspense comes from attempting to read the clues placed by the killer, and the expectation of more of these clues through the

²⁴ *Manhunter* uses this spelling of the character's name, whilst *The Silence of the Lambs*, *Hannibal* and *Red Dragon* use Lecter. I will retain the difference.

constitution of seriality.

Alison Young, writing before most of the films in the subgenre were made, seems to have foretold of the tendency when defining a broader range of crime stories (including those depicting Holmes, Philip Marlowe, and V.I. Warshawski). Noting the trend of the investigator discovering clues via minute examination and forensic work, Young recognizes ‘an aesthetic form that combines the body as a repository of clues and signs with the trauma of witnessing the event of victimization’ (1996, 79). Patrice Fleck makes a similar interpretation, but is aware of the active part played by the killer. Fleck states that the work of the serial killer is ‘a type of language or mode of communication that gives clues to his identity and his moral project’ (1995/6, 39). And as Fleck continues, the narratives in these films ‘are structured around detectives (and audiences) learning to “read” the marks on bodies which at first seem to be arbitrary and senseless signifiers of spectacular brutality’ (1995/6, 39). More than forensic evidence, the body becomes the artistic serial killer’s material to perform the clues. Consequently, as well as the body being marked, it is deliberately staged and displayed to form conceptual art. The body is graphically controlled, as is its meaning. Like the tattooed body, the victim’s body is a body encoded with meaning.

For Fleck, the relationship between criminal and investigator is teacher to student, with the detective learning the language from the killer’s instructive displays. In other words, the killer retains all control. But G.K. Chesterton’s description that ‘The criminal is the creative artist; the detective only the critic’ seems more apposite (in J. Black 1991, 41). Yet, in many ways, the view is still too dismissive of the role of the profiler or surrogate profiler. David Lehman is more complimentary when he argues ‘the criminal is an artist, the detective an aesthete and a critic, and the blundering policeman a philistine’ (in Simpson 2000, 74).

Correspondingly, the profiling investigator works outside the justice system as defined by the lumbering police or FBI. Thus, Amelia (Angelina Jolie) is obliged to steal evidence in *The Bone Collector* because the Captain of Police has fallen into the killer's trap of thinking that a fingerprint found at the crime scene is the murderer's. As in *Se7en*, where a similar deliberate fingerprint only leads to another victim (whose severed hand had been used to create the false trail), Amelia plays the role of critic, and recognizes the incorrect syntax of the clue. The blundering policeman however, cannot read the signs left for him, and only discovers a body with a missing finger. Amelia, and in the case of *Se7en*, Somerset (Morgan Freeman), far from being the students Fleck describes, are exceptional scholars, and are able to interpret the hieroglyphics of the killer; the reason for the slow progress is due not to education, but time-consuming deciphering. Thus, where others see repetition the investigating critic sees creativity, and what looks like mindless mutilation, is rationalized composition. The serial killer is controlled, and so are his crimes.

A repercussion is the application of meaning to the acts of the serial killer, deeds that are frequently classified as inexplicable. There is a security in such a belief, for the work or art at the crime scene is made understandable. Writing in 1993, with Hannibal Lecter in mind, David Thomson states: 'It is so often our killers now who are blessed with wisdom and insight. They are the only characters allowed to turn to philosophy or talk for the sake of talking' (14). From Detective Somerset in *Se7en* onwards, and with traces in Clarice in *The Silence of the Lambs*, the statement no longer holds true. The investigator or profiler now ponders and ruminates as he or she interprets the crime scene. Consequently, the investigator can demonstrate his/her equivalent insight by explaining the meanings in the crime scene art to us the spectators (we are presumed to fall between his/her capabilities and those of the philistine law enforcement workers). Such a formation has the potential for an

exceedingly reactionary treatment of crime and detection: however bizarre the crime, nothing is beyond deductive reasoning.

The rise of the profiler as critic sends reverberations back to the killer. With the narrative focus placed on interpretation of the events, there is a potential for the murderer to be overshadowed; in the Barthesian sense, we have the death of the author. *Se7en* engages with the eclipsing via its killer, both through the anonymity of his name, John Doe, an everyman nobody, and via his turning himself in with a quarter of the film remaining. His work, which still has to be concluded with two more murders to complete the Seven Deadly Sins, comes even more to the fore. Thus, he demonstrates his control over the crime scenes, but also the series of crimes. Some films in the subgenre still seem governed by the detective story's structuring premise of discovering the identity of the killer (*The Bone Collector*, *Bone Daddy*, *Messiah* and *Ripper*). But like *Se7en*, both *Copycat* and *Manhunter* understate the killer as a character, with the denouement being the resolution of the puzzle, not the exposure of the criminal.

In spite of the discrepancies over how the serial killer is made known, the subgenre does not concentrate on him, and the situation is made more pronounced through very little of the violence taking place onscreen; instead, the detective or profiler narrates the past events via the images of the crime scene. As we have seen, the texts require a unique person to decode clues and inform the audience. Unlike Young's grouping of sleuths and examiners in literature, the artistic serial killer subgenre puts little faith in the purely scientific (forensics, databases, pseudo-scientific profiles), in its place, the evidence is there to be read, and therefore needs to be explored in detail. However, for the investigator (and criminal) to be deemed extraordinary, the clues need to be visible but simultaneously concealed or masked. At these moments, the victim's body is the site where the two jostle for control. The

veiling agent the subgenre uses is specialist knowledge, not scientific as in the earlier formats of the detective fiction, but that of high culture.

The Cultured Serial Killer

In *Kiss the Girls*, the kidnapping killer, Casanova (Cary Elwes), obtains his name by leaving a signed note at a murder scene. But far from being a great lover, he has to kidnap women, keep them in a harem, and, in pursuit of further control, demand they tell him they love him (a lack of conviction will result in their deaths); as a female doctor states, 'he doesn't know his history. The real Casanova, would never have approved.' His sense of taste is also in question, particularly his forcing of the captive women to hold a musical concert in the nude for his appreciation. In fact, the upper-class Gentleman Caller (Tony Goldwyn), who aids Casanova but also copycats him, criticizes his style. Arriving at his lair, which is set into the underground slave quarters of a plantation, he disdainfully comments that the 'subterranean gothic [look] went out a while ago'.

As a serial killer, Casanova does not quite cut the mustard, a fault perhaps due to him being a collector not a proper killer. But it also seems to relate to him being a blue-collar cop: a worker not a thinker. The film too underplays the artistry element of the subgenre (except in respect of copycatting, and the elaborately tied bodies). Consequently, in the few crime scenes shown, control is not foregrounded by deliberately displayed clues. But the character of Alex Cross (Morgan Freeman), a forensic psychologist and writer of true crime stories, emphatically fits the bill of the investigator aesthete.²⁵ The film's lack of display leaves it on the cusp of the subgenre, but its playing with the perceptions of taste and class point towards the

²⁵ The notion of detective as critic is highlighted even more in *Along Came a Spider* (Lee Tamahori, USA, 2001), where Morgan Freeman reprises the role. Although not featuring a serial killer, the kidnapping crime scene is played out as if it was a murder scene in an artistic serial killer film, with clues deliberately placed to be read by the investigator.

delineation of the serial killer as a cultured artist. But with the emphasis on the investigator as critic, it falls on him to be an arbiter of taste as well.

In *White of the Eye*, Detective Mendoza (Art Evans) is confronted by the vista of a brutal murder. A combination of handheld tracking shots, overhead compositions, and abrupt tilts and zooms suggest an omnipotent puzzled gaze. In the white, modernist kitchen, a goldfish bowl full of orange liquid, a blouse, and a distinctly positioned high-heel shoe, rest on a broken microwave. Elsewhere in the kitchen, Mendoza lifts a protective sheet of polythene and unveils a saucepan containing ominously fleshy material in a plastic bag. Surrounding the pan, four knives point outwards forming a vicious compass design, and red blood smears the white work surface. On a wall, more congealed blood is shown. Framed by wooden batons behind polythene, the camera rotates as if beholding modern art and attempting to determine which way up it should be. Acting as a canvas, a table, complete with spotlight, has an inkblot pattern of blood, next to which, are a pressed rose, an onion and a stick of celery (figure 4.7).

Turning to his colleague, Mendoza announces: 'I know a goddamn work of art when I see one. Didn't you ever look at a Picasso, Lucas?' 'Picasso, my ass,' is Lucas's (Bob Zache) reply. Undeterred, Mendoza persists: 'We're talking post-Cubist Picasso. Or maybe even later.' The detective's comment is punctuated by Lucas demanding, 'Why should I look at a goddamn Picasso? I'm a medical man not a goddamn hippy.' As we have established, art and medicine, far from being irreconcilable, have a common heritage stretching from da Vinci to von Hagens. But Lucas's comments betray more than his ignorance. Mendoza reproaches Lucas for being a bore: someone he 'can't even hold a civilized conversation with'. The tripartite relationship of murder artist, detective aesthete, and policeman (or all those not the detective) as philistine is verified. In particular, at stake are the 'civilizing'



Figure 4.7 Murder scene as modernist canvas in *White of the Eye*

aspects of high culture. Of course, incorporated in the example are the interpretative skills (and philosophy) required for non-representational art (a very elitist form of high culture). The indecipherability of modern art is made even more apparent in *Se7en*. At the Greed murder scene, a photograph of the victim's wife has blood circles around her eyes that suggest she has, or can, see something. When shown crime scene photographs, she identifies that a piece of modern art has been rehung upside down. Looking behind the painting, the detectives find the message 'Help me' written in fingerprints. The handiwork is then itself displayed, being framed by four ultraviolet tubes, as if replacing the painting (figure 4.8). The image is a stark recognition of the serial killer as artist. And by the fingerprints being a clue to the next crime scene, they indicate the killer's control of this murder and the series.

Although Mendoza's comments are striking, there is little else that would situate *White of the Eye* in the artistic serial killer subgenre; the meanings in the art are not seen as explicable, the relationship between the investigator and the killer is not expanded upon, and the killings are given equal status with the post-death crime scenes. But the scene mentioned above is so indicative of the later concerns of the

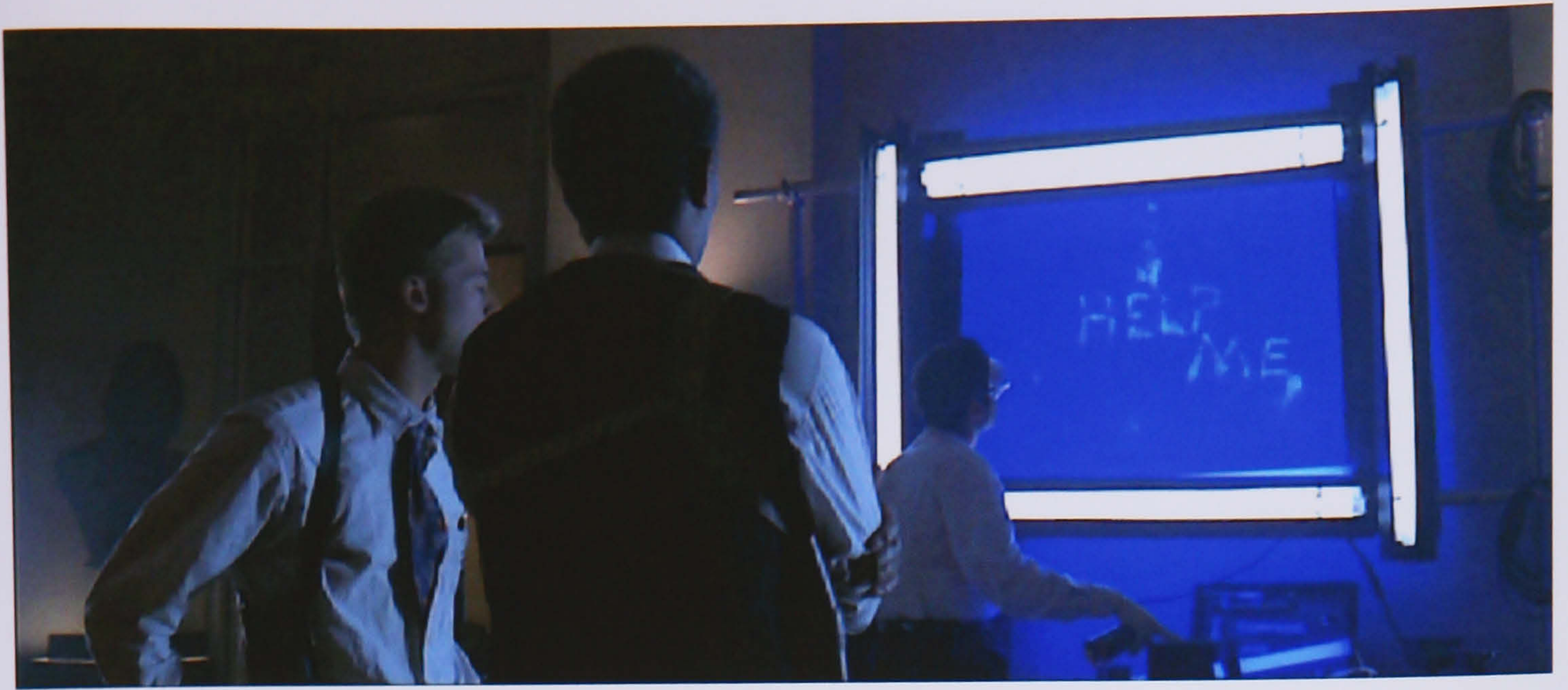


Figure 4.8 Framing the serial killer's artwork at the Greed murder scene in *Se7en*

subgenre, that the film can be regarded as an important embryonic formation of it.

The standards encapsulated in Mendoza's comments, those of the significance of the display and interpretation of high culture via acquired knowledge and learning, occur with great regularity throughout the subgenre. The most advanced example of the artistic serial killer is Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* (and later, *Hannibal* and *Red Dragon*). In *Manhunter*, Lecktor is softly spoken, manipulative and highly knowledgeable and resourceful. But it is in the subsequent screen appearances, when portrayed by Anthony Hopkins, that Lecter's refinement and finesse come to the fore. As a psychiatrist, (a standing reinforced by the title Doctor), he is defined as university-educated. Through his sketches of the Duomo from memory, he is disclosed as a creator of fine art, and a cultured man intimately acquainted with the rich artistic heritage of the capital of the Renaissance. He even speaks the language of the elite: Latin. Genteelly, he presents fine manners to Clarice, and states, 'Discourtesy is unspeakably ugly to me'. Even whilst murdering, he exhibits highbrow concerns: when he ate the liver of the census taker he complemented it with Chianti and fava beans, and his killing of the police guards in Memphis, merely interrupts his absorption in the Goldberg Variations by J.S. Bach.

All these traits define his class.

Lecter effectively operates as a binary opposite to the other killer, James Gumb. Whilst Lecter is a cannibal and ingests his victims, Gumb skins his to cover his body. More especially though, juxtaposed to Lecter's witty complexity and refinement, Gumb is from the country, has a pronounced accent, is simple, and displays no sense of good manners. In *Manhunter*, Dollarhyde (the Tooth Fairy) too lacks sophistication and social skills in his everyday life.

Gumb and Dollarhyde have more in common with another depiction of the serial killer: the unambiguously working-class, under-socialized individual. Evident in films such as *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer, Kalifornia* (Dominic Sena, USA, 1993) and *Freeway 2: Confessions of a Trickbaby* (Matthew Bright, USA/France/Canada, 1999),²⁶ the white trash killer acts on impulse. *Kalifornia* is interesting because of the pairing of a redneck serial killer Early Grace (Brad Pitt) and his girlfriend Adele (Juliette Lewis) with a Yuppie writer Brian (David Duchovny) and his photographer girlfriend Carrie (Michelle Forbes) who are touring famous murder sites to research a book. Like a profiling investigator, Brian narrates the now deserted murder scenes into a dictation machine, but as Early points out, the gap between academic art and serial killing practice is too great for any book to have meaning. This subtle critique of profiling is voiced more adamantly in *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*. As Henry (Michael Rooker) instructs Otis (Tom Towles) on the finer arts of serial killing, Henry states,

If you shoot somebody in the head with a .45 every time you kill somebody, it becomes like your fingerprint, see? But if you strangle one, stab another, one you cut up, and one you don't, then the police don't know what to do. They think you're four different people.

²⁶ *Freeway 2: Confessions of a Trickbaby* is a relative rarity because of its depiction of female serial killers, but its heritage in the fairy tale Hansel and Gretel perhaps locates it in a different tradition.

What Henry advocates and practises is a random *modus operandi* and a random signature to keep him beyond the detection of a profiling investigator. However, as Philip L. Simpson rightly argues, Henry's avoidance of leaving decipherable clues classifies him 'as not so much a criminal genius but rather an "everyman" serial killer. His lower-class bluntness contrasts directly with the elitist, manipulative Hannibal Lecter' (2000, 138). The subgenre uses the artistry of the killer at the crime scene, especially in terms of the body, to display his superiority of control. He dictates how the crime will be solved, but also controls the meanings to be derived from them. For the status of serial killing artist and genius, the killer needs to leave clues, play games, and above all, display his control via highbrow intellect. Where Henry is impulsive but practical, the artistic killer is an intricate planner and a maestro of the theoretical.

Returning to *The Silence of the Lambs*, Yvonne Tasker has noted that: 'Lecter's sense of time is palpably different; both his speech and his movements are careful and measured' (2002, 8). Lecter oozes efficiency and order by way of his controlled demeanour and almost regal pacing; but any sense that his refinement is merely hereditary is removed because Clarice is consulting him for his knowledge. His classical pursuits (music, art, poetry and fine cuisine) mark him as a possessor of what Pierre Bourdieu termed 'cultural capital' (in Haralambos and Holborn 1991, 267-269). Lecter has access to power via his knowledge because he has been socialized into the dominant culture: he possesses information and proficiencies that are esteemed in society. Indeed, Bourdieu characterized a discrimination against the working class through values placed on 'nuances of *manners* and *style*' (in Haralambos and Holborn 1991, 268), and it is these traits that personify Lecter. Cultural capital, via its association with the dominant culture, privileges the learning of the upper classes and undervalues those of the working-class culture. Education is

seen as perpetuating the elitism because although it operates as a supposedly neutral meritocracy, it favours those who have internalized the skills and knowledge of dominant culture in their preschool years.

In the context of acquiring educational capital (formally sanctioned cultural capital), it should not go unnoticed how frequently the subgenre situates itself in the world of academia and learning. Clarice, although ‘not more than one generation from poor white trash’, and therefore lacking much cultural capital, receives specialist coaching from her twin mentors of Lecter and Jack Crawford whilst she is educated at the FBI Academy.²⁷ *Ripper* is set in a college where students study serial killers and the lecturer has written a book ‘proving’ the identity of Jack the Ripper. In *Copycat*, the film begins with Dr Hudson giving her lecture, and the film ordains her specialist knowledge to be beyond the scope of ordinary police. In *Hannibal*, it is Lecter giving the lecture as librarian at a Florentine archive, his subject matter perpetuating the highbrow values of dominant culture. In *Blowback*, the serial killer, Whitman (James Remar), was once a respected biblical scholar, and his chief pursuer, Inspector Morrell (Mario Van Peebles), had studied to be a priest, memorized the Bible word for word, and has a partner so in awe of his learning that she is ‘honoured’ to be his new assistant. Similarly, Amelia in *The Bone Collector*, respects the academic ability of her new partner, Lincoln Rhyme (Denzel Washington), or ‘The textbook guy’ as she calls him.

The written word is especially prized in the subgenre. A book and its writer drive the narrative of *Bone Daddy*; Alex Cross’s status in *Kiss the Girls* is confirmed by his authorial credentials (‘the best-selling crime author has arrived’); the written work of Dr Hudson features in *Copycat*; and *Se7en* highlights a canonical list of texts

²⁷ Lecter at one point obliges Clarice to admit to her student status when he notes she only has a temporary FBI pass. In the context of *The Silence of the Lambs*, Patrice Fleck’s model of the killer as teacher is correct, but it is an unsatisfactory template for the whole subgenre.

including Dante's *Purgatory*, Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and St Thomas Aquinas's work, as well as John Doe's own journals. Indeed, *Se7en* constructs a hierarchy out of the learning. Having proposed a seriality founded on the Seven Deadly Sins, Somerset begins his research in the reified atmosphere of the closed library; the substantial columns and echoing space suggest the heritage and gravitas of being the repository for mankind's body of wisdom. His only company in what Somerset calls 'a world of knowledge' are the uniformed guards who play poker. Diegetically accompanied by Bach's 'Air on a G String', (offered up by a guard with the phrase, 'How's this for culture?'),²⁸ we see Somerset examining the works of Chaucer and Dante, with the camera dwelling on close-ups of words and phrases, as well as the accompanying engravings, which establish the properties of the books and their allied culture. Through crosscutting, the film shows Detective Mills simultaneously puzzling over pictures of the crime scene. Whilst Somerset finds potential meaning in the written texts, which he photocopies for his colleague, Mills finds only images in the photographs, and so watches basketball on television instead. Mills's lack of cultural capital is played out in the following scene, where he resorts to Cliff's *Pass Notes* having been exasperated when trying to understand Dante's own writing.

Later too, the educational differences of the partners are exposed. When Somerset notes Doe's referencing of *The Merchant of Venice* at the Greed murder, Mills dismisses it with, 'Didn't see it', as if it was a movie of the week. Mills also mispronounces de Sade as if he was related to the soul singer Sade, and Somerset corrects Mills's potential line of thinking when he hesitates suspiciously over the book *Of Human Bondage*, the implication being it might indicate an interest in

²⁸ The fact that 'Air on a G Sting' is the more familiar title for the Air from Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D major, indicates it is part of the same group of popular classical music that we saw in *Boxing Helena*, where the notoriety enforces the classical properties.

BDSM (which, naturally, in a Hollywood film, would correlate to serial killing). Even their names signal their different standards of learning and acumen. William Somerset not only has a surname that suggests the end of summer, therefore replicating his wealth of knowledge gleaned from a career about to end, but also a full name that forms the first two-thirds of the author of the novel *Of Human Bondage*. David Mills, by contrast, evokes labour, treadmills and the plodding grind of the police philistine. Doe seems aware of the differences too, thus when Mills spells out his name to Doe at the Sloth crime scene (thinking he is a prying photographer), Doe retorts, 'I'm surprised you can spell.' What is puzzling though, is Doe's position in relation to learning. As I have suggested, his name indicates everyman status, but his seven connected crimes, each based on one of the Seven Deadly Sins, and each requiring intricate planning, make him extraordinary. Indeed, Somerset shows admiration for Doe, noticing how controlled he needed to be in the Sloth murder case, where he kept his victim alive for a whole year. Thus, Somerset declares, 'Imagine the will it takes'. However, Doe's apartment, full of his tightly written journals, and badly taken photographs, suggest he is an autodidact, and perhaps lacking some cultural capital.

Richard Dyer has studied these layers of cultural understanding and has argued that the film 'addresses us as people familiar with high culture' (1999, 73). For example, recognizing the *Pass Notes* requires us to have had a college education, and the confusion over *Of Human Bondage* necessitates us to be acquainted with the title to get the resonance of the joke. Dyer thus postulates that the referencing of high culture gives *Se7en* 'a respectability [and] lineage' (1999, 73) that films like *Maniac* and *The Silence of the Lambs* do not approach. Although true, the reading only gives part of the relationship.

As if acknowledging (and laying claim to) their referencing of art and high

culture, it is noticeable that many of the serial killer films use their title credits as collages of significant, but abstracted, images from the narrative of the film. Further, these are frequently fused or overlaid with the written word (see *Se7en*, *The Bone Collector*, and *Ripper*). With its intricate yet rough coalescing of scratched film stock, deliberately bleached and distorted photographs of victims, and close-ups of pages from the tightly written meanderings of John Doe (all of which add texture to the body of the film but are glossed over amidst the rich *mise-en-scene*), *Se7en*'s title sequence establishes the mindset of the killer. Even the credits themselves take the form of scratched, jumpy writing, and align the information with the hand of John Doe, who in various images is seen constructing a cacophony of collages and written texts of his own. The words do more than imply cultural capital though; they articulate the subgenre's consistent theme of meaning residing in the spectacle of suffering: there is a need to *read* the crime scenes to understand them.

We should recognize the deployment of cultural capital in the artistic serial killer subgenre is another potentially reactionary trend. By pointing to an extraordinary enlightenment and grasp of high culture, the serial killer is made inconceivably dangerous. His intellect and cunning are constructed as if with no bounds. But there is surety simultaneously operating. Such a person, with so much potential is, by definition, rare, and by implication, serial killers are rare. In other words, the reality (or accepted profile) of the serial killer, which is of a white male with slightly above average intelligence, has a potential pool of millions, but the artistic serial killer can only come from a minute source. Such people must therefore be very scarce.

Further, that the killer is controlled and guided by cultural capital also makes him containable, because the same precise and prized cultural capital offers the solution to his puzzles/crimes. The murders therefore require expert knowledge to solve them. Thus, the crimes reference classical texts (*Se7en*), religion (*Messiah*,

Resurrection and *Se7en*), art (*The Bone Collector*, *Hannibal* and *The Silence of the Lambs*), history (*The Bone Collector*) and the written word (*The Bone Collector*, *Bone Daddy*, *Copycat*, *Kiss the Girls* and *Ripper*). Some toy with popular culture, for example the cult of the serial killer (*Copycat* and *Ripper*) and pulp fiction (*The Bone Collector*), but they persist in equating it to specialist education. These films move away from *Manhunter*, where the profiler is located as a somewhat magical yet scientific character via his mind association, and instead situate him/her as an extremely learned and deductive cultural critic. The ability of an investigator to have (or rapidly attain) the same cultural and educational baggage as the killer, performs a useful argument for justifying the need for investigators as saviours, and confirms their capacity to restore order.

For all the reassurances, we cannot ignore the aestheticized controlled body that looms large in the subgenre. The anagrams that Lecter uses in *The Silence of the Lambs* are peripheral but indicate his analytical mind. When Clarice goes in search of Miss Hester Mofet (or Miss The Rest of Me), she finds the decapitated head of Benjamin Raspail preserved in a jar next to the headless mannequin posed in women's clothes in the back of a limousine. Not killed by Lecter, who 'merely tucked him away', the artfully staged scene (and discovery), in all its organic decay, is reminiscent of Salvador Dali's *Raining Taxi* (1938), which features bewigged and bemasked mannequins inside a water doused car overrun with foliage. Although the wordplay leads to the theatrically presented head, it is the head itself, with its garish make-up, and the neighbouring female couture, that are the clues to finding James Gumb. It is this artful display of evidence that the subsequent films in the subgenre built on, for the anagrams, enigmas, and meanings are spelt out in the bodies of the victims at the elaborate crime scenes. Names of sins may be written in blood and grease at the murder sites, and biblical references can be located in the bodies, but

these are mere titles. The manner of death is the clue, but also the act; the art of suffering must dazzle but not blind, it must overwhelm but still be read for clues. As we have seen, the artistic serial killer is astute, assured and controlled, but it is the aestheticized victim that is the primary controlled body in the subgenre. We therefore need to explore the consequences of the spectacle becoming narrative in the artistic serial killer subgenre.

The Aesthetics of Suffering

John A. Walker in *Art and Artists on Screen* has described how for many people in the Western world, ‘art has now replaced religion as the source of spiritual or transcendental experiences’, and that a cynic would describe art as “‘the opium of the intelligentsia’” (1993, 11). The belief in works of art being revelatory, but also biased towards the cultural securities of the intellectual elite, is pertinent to the artistic serial killer. But far from aiming for the soporific effect of a narcotic, the murderer’s objective is to shock complacency. The killer’s challenge is therefore to retain the splendour when the overwhelming reaction is revulsion. David Freedberg, in *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, has characterized the accepted view of art as, ‘If it is too troublesome ... [it] is not a work of art’ (1989, 422). Traditionally, the gallery has not been a place of displayed emotions, but a location for quiet reserve and genteel appreciation of the aesthetic qualities. Thus, art is usually perceived as intended to inspire or raise spirits, but not provoke and overpower. Freedberg’s work attempts to collapse the imposed distinction between the religious or magical powers of art, and those supposed to be purely aesthetic, and so reinstate the power of art to elicit overwhelming and uncontrollable responses such as revulsion, devotion and disgust. His theoretical restorative study is put into practice by the artistic serial killer.

Freedberg's interest in the unsettling properties of art is, in itself, a product of dominant culture. When the fascination for the disturbing and startling properties of art moved into the margins with the demise of religious patronage, it remained an intellectual pursuit for various art movements (e.g. Surrealism and Viennese Actionists). More recently, artists including Damien Hirst, Andres Serrano, Jenny Saville and the Chapman brothers have once more brought a taste for the troublesome to the fore. The artistic serial killer subgenre locates itself within the renewed interest, but historicizes the fascination by exploiting the lineage of artistic (usually religious) suffering, and so enhances the depiction of the cultural capital of the killer by showing his awareness of the heritage.²⁹

To incorporate highbrow culture into murder, many films in the subgenre turn to the long tradition of religious paintings. The imagery has the twin attributes of connoting learning and creativity. A third element is similarly significant: paintings can suggest the activity of suffering, even though static. If we think of the various depictions of St Sebastian, his body tied to a tree and arrows piercing his flesh, he passively exhibits torment. The stasis is partly a result of the restraints, and the impassivity of a martyr's suffering, but the result is an image of suffering undisturbed by the blur of action. The artistic serial killer film achieves a comparable stasis by not showing the event of suffering, but instead depicting the posed aftermath. The very stillness enhances our awareness of the control over the body: it is posed, framed and rich with meaning that would be clouded by movement. The painted martyr epitomizes the aestheticized spectacle of the controlled body, and the

²⁹ An exception, *The Cell*, attempts to mine predominantly contemporary representations of unsettling art. I noted in Chapter 3 that the serial killer in the film suspends himself by hooks through his flesh in an emulation of the Body Play associated with Fakir Musafar. In addition, a vertically segmented horse is reminiscent of work by both Hirst and von Hagens. But by situating most of the film within the mind of the serial killer, a place resembling the setting of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and the Quay Brothers' *Street of Crocodiles* (UK, 1986), the phantasmagoric rather than the cerebral is induced. Further, highbrow culture is lost to the popular culture effects of MTV-style rapid cuts, advertising chic, and an emphasis on surface not substance.

filmic subgenre draws heavily on its iconography.

Some films in the subgenre still include the assault: think of Lecter attacking the guards in Memphis. But the trauma of that scene is in greater evidence when the camera comes back to find Lecter supposedly gone. Hanging on the cage, draped with bunting, is the eviscerated body of Boyle with his arms outstretched (figure 4.9). The crucifixion shape is the most iconographic image of suffering in the Western world. In *The Silence of the Lambs*, the image carries some of the weight of the tradition, but it also forms two clues. The tableau resembles a butterfly, the symbol of transformation associated with Gumb, but in this scene, also linked to Lecter, because he has disguised himself with the facial skin and clothes of one of the guards. Stressing the need to read the display for clues, we see the vignette three times: first through the frosted glass, then via a shot where the camera pulls back from the body to give the complete tableau, and then once more as a policeman tends to the man he thinks is the other guard. Thus, the display intrigues, shocks and misleads, but all within a familiar context of suffering and art.

Outside the Rules, a two-part BBC drama lives up to its name by not conforming to the subgenre model of displaying the murder scene. However, it has a novel way of indicating contemplation: the recovery of regressed memory. A serial killer nicknamed The Carpenter is crucifying his victims. In one attack, Tom Meredith (Tim Dutton) survives, but is forced to watch and participate in his wife's execution. A female forensic psychiatrist, Natalie Vine (Daniela Nardini), is brought in to help Meredith remember any details he has tried to erase from his memory. Natalie specifically asks for pictures not words, and so a form of contemplation exists via his recounting. Brief flashbacks of the assault are shown, but are narrated by Meredith in the third person in a manner akin to an investigator of a crime scene. Events are pieced together until Meredith recalls having to read a script given to him by the



Figure 4.9 Iconic tableau of suffering in *The Silence of the Lambs*

killer: a ‘signature’ that demonstrates the killer’s complete control. In the orchestrated dialogue, Meredith congratulates the serial killer’s handiwork saying, ‘That’s lovely. It’s beautiful.... Susan might give you ten out of ten.’ The equating of art to the crime scene is not the killer’s alone; at the site of a fresh murder, a detective asks of Natalie, ‘Care to express an opinion on the artwork?’ Later too, the police discuss how the killer needs to be ‘taken seriously as an artist’. It would be fair to say though, that few clues are arrived at through an appreciation or application of cultural capital, even though the depictions rely on referencing Christianity. The same could not be said of *Blowback*, *Resurrection* and *Messiah*, which all exploit the credentials of the faith.

The iconography of *Blowback* is resolutely beholden to depictions of the martyred saints. The film opens with a woman crucified on an inverted cross. Dressed in a cloak like a monk, John Matthew Whitman fires a nail from a nail gun into her hand. Uncomfortably blurring eroticism with non-consensual violence, the bare-breasted woman screams ‘I’ll do anything you want’; the attacker responds, ‘His will be done.’

Inspector Morrell and a colleague enter the building and search their way through the maze of altars, candles, icons and crucifixes. On seeing the body, Morrell reads the scene: 'St Andrew. He was crucified upside down.' A note stating 'Proverbs 11:22' is taken from inside the now dead woman's mouth, and Morrell immediately translates it for the other detective: 'As a jewel in a swine's mouth, so is a beautiful woman without discretion.' In the ensuing battle with the killer, the colleague is killed and Morrell is partially crucified on the floor, before capturing Whitman.

The opening establishes Morrell as both mentally and physically superior to Whitman, although scarred mentally and physically (pseudo-stigmata). Indeed, the film proceeds with Whitman being executed in a gas chamber. However, a secret government agency clandestinely revives him, and brainwashes him into being an assassin. Whitman instantly absconds, and goes in search of the judge, jurors, and prosecution lawyer (Morrell's ex-wife) who combined to sentence him to death.

Whitman's overarching seriality is dictated by the alphabetic order of the names of his victims. Morrell is coupled with him through their knowledge of the Bible, and by being similarly turned on by eroticized violence (Morrell's ex-wife guesses he 'must be back on a case' when they have passionate sex). The closeness enables Morrell to perceive the broader scope of the targeted victims, and to suspect more than a copycat killer.

What confirms *Blowback*'s place in the subgenre is the structure and depiction of the deaths. Whitman, when nearly captured by Morrell, complains, 'You're forcing me to change the order of kill.' In other words, part of the creativity and control is the sequence. Each murder that is part of the sequence is also imaginative, for they all take the form of martyred saints. Furthermore, although Whitman's initial attacks on some of the victims are shown, the subsequent artistry is withheld until Morrell

investigates. When the foreman of the jury is the first person to be attacked, Whitman closes the garage door, and the scene cuts away after one hammer blow is struck. The effect correlates to De Quincey's narrative in 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts: Postscript in 1854'. With the serial killer John Williams having gained access to a house, De Quincey states:

Meantime, at this point, let us leave the murderer alone with his victims. For fifty minutes let him work his pleasure. The front-door, as we know, is now fastened against all help.... [W]hen all is over, let us come back ... and read the dreadful record of all that has passed. (1897c, 85)

When we, as spectators, return to Whitman's murder scene, it is with Morrell and his new partner Detective Monica Ricci (Sharisse Baker). At first, all that is seen is a pool of blood, and Ricci asks if someone has moved the body. But the corpse is hanging from the rafters, its intestines stretched out and wound around a hose reel.

Instantly, Morrell declares 'Elmo', but the philistine police chief, Captain Barnett (David Groh), 'corrects' him, saying his name is Edward Ackers. Morrell explains that St Elmo is the Patron Saint of Sailors, and had his intestines wound around a windlass. Ricci proclaims she has never heard of him, thus exposing a lack of classical knowledge.³⁰ While the senior officer gags and covers his mouth with a tissue, Morrell probes the body (figure 4.10). Suffering is writ large on the body, but the control is in the detail. The scene is quite literally read for clues; hidden in the mouth of the victim is the quotation reference 'Corinthians 15:21', which Morrell recalls from memory. His actions and knowledge define Morrell as special; even though later in the film he attempts to persuade Ricci that he's 'a regular guy; no better than you', his cultural capital disproves the opinion.

At the next murder scene, he recognizes the woman, who has had her breasts removed, to be modelled on St Agatha, before continuing with a history lesson

³⁰ *The Cell* also recreates the martyrdom of St Elmo, and relates it to a postcard of a painted version.



Figure 4.10 Inspecting the suffering of 'St Elmo' in *Blowback*

explaining that early scholars made her the Patron Saint of Bell-ringers because they believed the depictions of her carrying her breasts on a platter actually showed bells. His knowledge has applications too, for although the victim is staged exactly according to the killer's desires, the body is the location where the artistic killer and detective aesthete battle for intellectual control. It may take the duration of the film, but Morrell will be the person to comprehend the full significance of the quotation clue at this murder scene: 'For as yet they did not know the scripture, yet he had risen again from the dead.' For scripture we can substitute script, for it is the serial killer's sequence of murders that Morrell will detect.

With the resurrected Whitman copycatting his own murderous signature, the film corresponds to the repetition structure of *Copycat* and *Messiah II: Vengeance is Mine* (where past crimes that have been solved by using forged evidence are restaged with relatives of the corrupt officials as victims). Ending with Morrell's wife on a crucifix, Morrell again defeats Whitman, killing him with a combination of bullets and a crucifix fired from a crossbow. By impaling him on a cross, and referring to Whitman's violent upbringing, Morrell stages his death: St Tarsus, the Patron Saint

of abused children.

Resurrection, like *Blowback*, is concerned with religious suffering. However, unlike Morrell in *Blowback*, Detective Prudhomme (Christopher Lambert) in *Resurrection* has to work to decipher the clues. In a less elaborate version of the library scene in *Se7en*, Prudhomme pores over books to solve the crimes. As with Somerset, he is an aesthete who can appreciate the genius of the crime scenes.³¹ Prudhomme recognizes the planning and artistry, and can, like De Quincey, separate his moral and aesthetic reactions to murder: 'I admire the intellect, not the action.' Thus, there is a pleasure, of sorts, in pain.

The first body discovered is a man called Peter. Thirty-three, and an owner of a fleet of fishing boats, he is found tied to a chair in a room described as 'ripe', with his right arm missing. The significance of the malodour should not go unnoticed. Smell is the immediate sensorial response at many real-life murder scenes, and the visual medium of cinema attempts to recreate this (remember the captain in *Blowback*, and think of Mills sniffing the bucket of vomit at the Gluttony crime in *Se7en*). Strange marks are found on the body, and seriality is forewarned in the bloody message on the window: 'He's coming'. Perfectly still, the body is examined, and the doctor confirms, by the volume of blood, that Peter was alive when his arm was removed.

Like Prudhomme, we attempt to read the body for clues. Unlike the murderous attack in a slasher film, it is less easy to avert our eyes, for we may miss the vital piece of evidence that Prudhomme may refer to later, or even miss. By necessitating

³¹ *Resurrection* borrows liberally from *Se7en* in other respects too: the lack of light at the crime scenes (which is commented on), a persistence of rain (including when the sun is shining), and neon cross. *Resurrection* also repeats part of *Se7en*'s narrative by having the killer aiming to punish the investigator by attacking his wife. Thus, the killer, having gone to the Prudhomme's home, tells him, 'Your penitence shall be remorse: remorse, for the death of your wife' (although by mistake he has killed her friend). Of course, what most unites the two films is the killer having an all-encompassing project formed by a series of linked, staged deaths.

our look, the film uses the body to control our gaze, just as the killer controls Prudhomme's attention. To enjoy the film we must enjoy the aestheticized pain. Whilst examining, we are given an extended opportunity to imagine the events that unfolded; the more elaborate the detail at the crime scene, the longer we need to look. The artistic serial killer therefore justifies our lengthy contemplation. As Alison Young describes in respect of the detective in literary fiction, his or her licence to look in and open all intimate places and to eavesdrop on the secret, is enjoyed by the reader without guilt (1996, 92). Even more powerfully in the context of the artfully staged suffering created by the serial killer, it makes 'voyeurism a duty' (Young 1996, 92).

It comes as little surprise then that the voyeurism extends to the autopsy.³² Again we scrutinize the body, with more detailed accounts of the pain it endured: exsanguination, endorphins in the blood revealing the killer waited for him to wake up before severing the arm, Roman numerals marked into the flesh, and a key shape etched into the skin. Without knowing quite how it fits into an overall scheme, Prudhomme recognizes the simplicity of the motive: the killer 'wanted his arm'. The indentation of the key helps confirm the view: it is quite literally a body modification coded with meaning. Tracing it to a station locker, a rare flower inside leads Prudhomme to the body of Matthew Leeson, which is buried in a botanical garden. An Internal Revenue Service worker, Leeson has had his left arm removed, and again has Roman numerals marked into his body. To repeat Alison Young's comment, here we have 'the body as a repository of clues' (1996, 79). The next body is displayed more prominently: James is found decapitated, his head missing, and seated on the toilet, or as a cop puts it, 'on the throne for dramatic effect'.

³² The opening murders of *Resurrection* and *Se7en* are very similar. Both begin with a body tied to a chair, a hidden message in the room, and an autopsy following the scene that provides additional clues.

Although Prudhomme puzzles over the numerals, it is the victim's driving licence photograph that enlightens him. Examining the shoulder-length hair and gentle face, he recognizes the familiar iconography, and later proclaims, 'The guy's rebuilding the body of Christ.' Further, he discovers the names and occupations of the victims match the respective apostles, they all died on a Friday aged thirty three as Christ did, and if continuing at the same rate of obtaining a limb a week, the serial killer will complete the body for Easter: resurrection. Thus, the iconography of suffering is once again based on Christian imagery. And although the individual murders are not as aesthetically pleasing as *Se7en*'s, it is made abundantly clear that we should read them as evidence of talent. Turning death into art aestheticizes the pain.

For Prudhomme, the murders come at a moment of crisis in his faith because his child has been run over and killed. However, he has to turn to his priest (David Cronenberg) to help solve the riddles of the Roman numerals (Biblical chapters and verses). The priest's scholarly input leads Prudhomme to the next victim, who is a photographer. The killer is still present when the detective arrives, and he merges with the life-size figurative artwork by posing in his mask within a frame; the serial killer artist becomes conceptual art. Unable to save the dying victim, who dies in his arms, Prudhomme and his colleague, Hollinsworth (Leland Orser), pursue the killer. However, in a dark rainy alley, Hollinsworth is attacked (again similar to *Se7en*, where Doe assaults Mills), and the police are tricked into believing he is the killer and shoot him in the leg. Later, the serial killer steals Hollinsworth's amputated limb to replace the one he had to leave at the studio. His theft makes the revelation near the end of the film all the more resonant, for whilst searching a house, Prudhomme

discovers all the body parts reassembled into a crucified body (figure 4.11).³³

At the crime scene, smell is once more emphasized, with men vomiting and covering their airways, and the noises and flashes of flies hitting the blue insect zappers exacerbating the sense of decay. In a gruesome version of reverence, some of the men are effectively forced to bow down to the constructed idol as they struggle to cope with the scene (figure 4.12). Prudhomme approaches, and in a series of point-of-view shots, we are situated as inspectors of the West's icon of suffering, but in a version that is enhanced by being a composite of other suffering. By now, accustomed to looking for clues, the pans match our eager inquisition. Prudhomme's recognition of his partner's leg via the gaping wound enhances the alertness to pain. In reverse shots, a captivated Prudhomme blinks, unable to take in the magnitude of the spectacle. Called to another room, he finds a bank of video recorders playing footage of the crucifix on a television. Accompanying the broadcast is a commentary by the killer in the manner of a television evangelist. The whole room resembles a Modern Art video installation. The effect is to confirm the status of the serial killer's work as art. But the accent remains on the memorable iconography of pain.

Along with the numerous candles and crucifixes in the house, a shrine contains a multitude of depictions of Jesus with a visible heart. Once more, high art provides a clue, and Prudhomme deduces the killer is searching for a new baby born to someone called Mary. Tracking the killer to a hospital, Prudhomme saves the infant when the murderer stabs his palm: like Morrell in *Blowback*, he receives the stigmata. The killer dies, falling arms outstretched, and Prudhomme regains his faith by saving the

³³ *Misteria* also features the creation of a body from body parts, but these all belong to one person who has died, and the parts have been given as transplants to different recipients who had to be murdered to retrieve them. *Mil gritos tiene la noche/Pieces* (Juan Piquer Simón, Spain/USA/Puerto Rico, 1982) is closer to *Resurrection*, featuring body parts from different bodies being collected and assembled into one body. What distinguishes *Pieces* is that the killer correlates the creation of the body with his completion of an actual jigsaw, which features a naked woman. Thus, for each limb he collects, he fits the corresponding piece into his jigsaw.

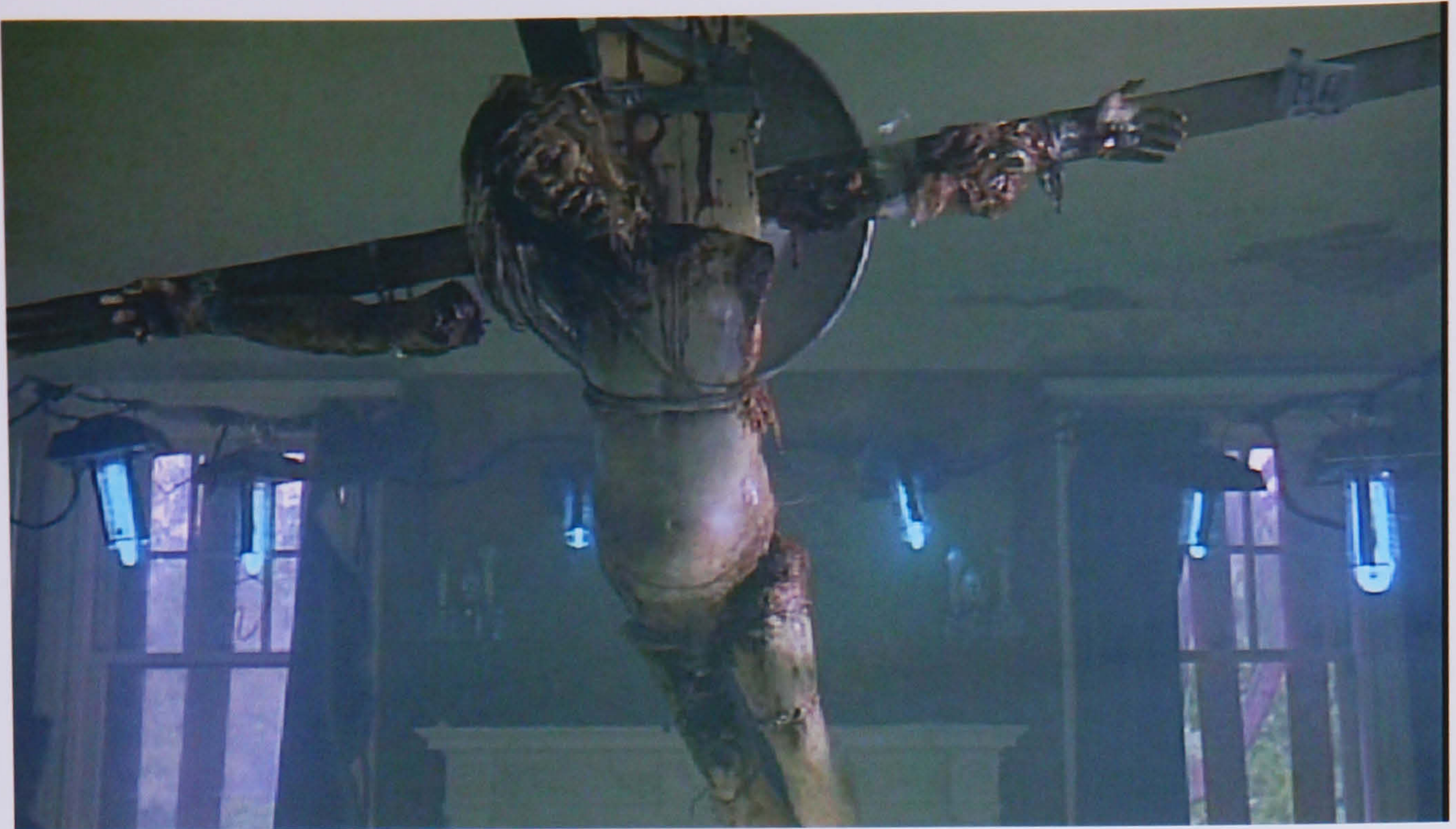


Figure 4.11 Amalgam of suffering in the crucified body in *Resurrection*



Figure 4.12 Overcome by the venerable iconography of pain in *Resurrection*

child. But the ending is inconsequential (in addition to being unconvincing); the inspection of the nearly completed project is the closure, for the artistic serial killer film is a fusion of violence and detection that encourages voyeuristic pleasure from interpreting the rituals and patterns of the murderer. Thus, the referencing of saints, the Bible and divine suffering plays on both cultural capital, and the very structure of Christian worship. Like the High Baroque, the spectator is encouraged to ‘participate in the ecstasies of the saints’ (Murray and Murray 1989, 22), but within the context

of the anatomical artist. The conjunction is rather fitting. Samuel Y. Edgerton argues that: ‘Anatomization of the criminal’s body [in the Florentine Renaissance] is in fact a sort of sacrament; the dissector himself assumes the role of transubstantiator’ (1985, 213). The serial killer artist is merely reversing the tradition.

Coming two years after *Blowback* and *Resurrection*, *Messiah* has elements of both. Once again, a traumatized cop is confronted with an artistic serial killer. Each victim is murdered in the style of one of the twelve apostles, and their names and jobs (or attributes) correspond to that apostle. The prime distinction of *Messiah* is that it is constructed as two seventy-five minute episodes. It is only near the end of the first episode, when DCI Red Metcalfe (Ken Stott) discovers a statue of St Bartholomew, that a link is made between the murders and the apostles; an earlier victim, named Bart, had been found flayed alive. Although only partly glimpsed by torchlight, the body, with its skin dangling from one hand, is a graphic realization of both the statue, and Gunther von Hagens’s posed *Plastination with Skin* (figure 4.13). Having four other victims already, the DCI realizes the potential for seven more gruesome displays. With the help of a learned cleric, and by literally crossing through the apostles on a photocopy of Leonardo da Vinci’s the *Last Supper* (1498), it is determined these would include Andrew crucified on a saltire and Simon the zealot being sawn in half. These features, and the comment that ‘Seven men will die if we don’t get this right’, end the first episode; the serial killer in a serial, can offer these as forthcoming attractions.

In addition, *Messiah* references crime scenes to art within a framework of highbrow interpretations. At the second murder site, Metcalfe asks his colleague, ‘What do you see?’ He is not asking what he can observe, but what he can interpret. As a critic, he has to conclude what the image means. But it is Metcalfe who narrates the events in minutiae from the scant evidence. A rival detective snidely notes his



Figure 4.13 *Plastination with Skin* by Gunther von Hagens

perfection, stating, 'All we need now is for you to tell us who did it and we can go home.' Metcalfe therefore conforms to the archetypal investigator of the subgenre: he is the intelligent aesthete to match the creative genius killer.

The following scene acts as a companion piece to the murder scene to highlight the comparison of art and murder, especially the reading of signs and the importance of cultural capital. Across a crowded gallery, Metcalfe's mute wife uses sign language to explain a painting: 'It's the coming together of the artist's respect for nature and the destructive forces his very presence in the 21st century wreaks on his environment.' The comment obviously applies to the artistic serial killer, but it has another function. When Metcalfe questions her with an 'And?', she elaborates by stating 'Load of bollocks', at which point the scene abruptly ends. The purpose of the interaction appears to be to stress a language of communication based on images and not words, both paintings and sign language. But it also accentuates how imperative

it is for an accurate interpretation by the critic: the very function the detective plays alongside the killer's art.

In spite of the direct comparison with art, the artistry of the murders in *Messiah* is founded on a different cultural capital: knowledge of religious suffering rather than pictorial representations. The same is true of most of the films in the subgenre. *Se7en*'s death scenes relate to themes of the Seven Deadly Sins, not classical representations of them (for example Bosch). *Hannibal* by contrast, does have Inspector Rinaldo Pazzi (Giancarlo Giannini) hung from the Caponni library in a recreation of both an event and a painting: the execution of one of Pazzi's relatives. The vast projection of a slide of the painting precedes the murder (figure 4.14), and the artistic heritage of Florentine statues surround the detective's body when he is hung (figure 4.15).³⁴ Although memorable, the event forms only a small part of the film. One film in the subgenre though, *The Bone Collector*, does concentrate on recreating actual artwork, but these bear little relation to high art, and none to religious iconography.

In *The Bone Collector*, New York detective and leading criminologist Lincoln Rhyme (the name suggests the intellectual properties of a wordsmith) is injured in the line of duty. As a bedridden quadriplegic, he controls his apartment via a host of computer consoles, monitors and voice-activated systems; these are the limits of his world. However, when a fresh-faced, eager policewoman, Amelia Donaghy discovers the mutilated body of a man who had been abducted with his wife, she becomes Rhyme's eyes, ears and other sensory organs beyond the confines of his home. Before even knowing him, she achieves the feat: by following strategies suggested in the textbook he had written, she preserves vital evidence at the crime

³⁴ The subplot of the investigation of the serial killer Il Mostro is largely missing from the film version of *Hannibal*, but cut scenes show Lecter advising Pazzi to spot similarities between a posed victim and Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*.



Figure 4.14 Attack on Rinaldo Pazzi silhouetted against a painting showing his ancestor's death in *Hannibal*

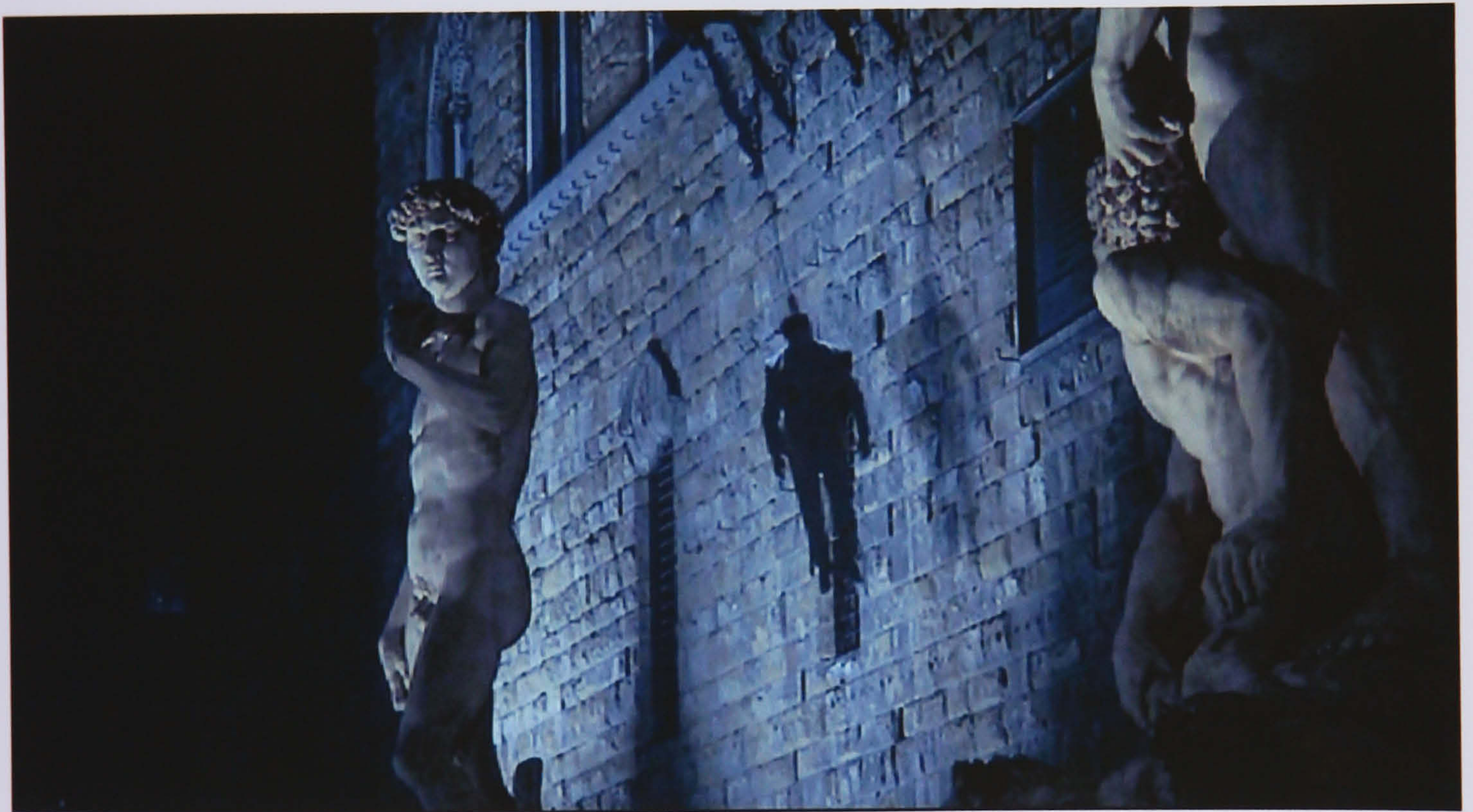


Figure 4.15 Rinaldo Pazzi in a recreation of his ancestor's death amidst the artistic heritage of Florence in *Hannibal*

site. When asked by Rhyme what she thought of the textbook, she states she's not 'a book critic', but as she admits, she found it useful; the investigator as critic reappears.

Reading the clues gathered by Amelia, Rhyme states: 'I'm convinced that this crime scene was staged. Perp's trying to tell us something.' A torn book page

number '119' is that day's date, 11:9 (November 9th), and the circled 4 pm on a piece of newspaper indicates the time the wife will be killed. These form the clues to the next crime, but part of an overarching clue is the tiny section of paper with a faint mark on it. Combined with two other portions found at later crime scenes, they produce a picture: a woman's face, which is 'An old, turn-of-the-century, publisher's logo.' A jigsaw puzzle that is both arts based and associated with the written word, it relates to the low status dime novel crime books and not high culture. Although the image is assembled by Rhyme's nurse (a jigsaw connoisseur), it takes his eclectic knowledge to identify it. Like a modern day Sherlock Holmes, Rhyme has collected and catalogued dirt, metal, plants, hubcaps and musical strings into databases in his spare time. Consequently, there is still an impression of cultural capital.

Tracing the publisher's logo, they find a novel called *The Bone Collector*. Accompanying the story is a collection of engravings of crime scenes, and they are the murders that have been replicated by the serial killer (figures 4.16 and 4.17). Indeed, it is these images rather than the story that the film implies have been copied, for the camera dwells on the images, and the book is not read for more clues. However, these are not the high culture of individually created religious art found in *Blowback*, *Messiah*, *Resurrection*, *Se7en* or even *Hannibal*, they are images from a lowbrow medium featuring mechanically reproduced imagery. The mass production and repetitive process of both the type of literature and engravings may appear more fitting for seriality,³⁵ but the appropriateness does not carry the resonance of suffering that the Biblical references provide; an image of a steam pipe pointing at a bound figure conveys little notion of the pain to follow. Perhaps this is why *The Bone Collector*, unlike most films in the subgenre, spends considerable time on the

³⁵ In the same context, we could think of Elsie's mother in Fritz Lang's *M* buying the next chapter of a serial from a door-to-door salesman whilst she awaits the return of her missing daughter.

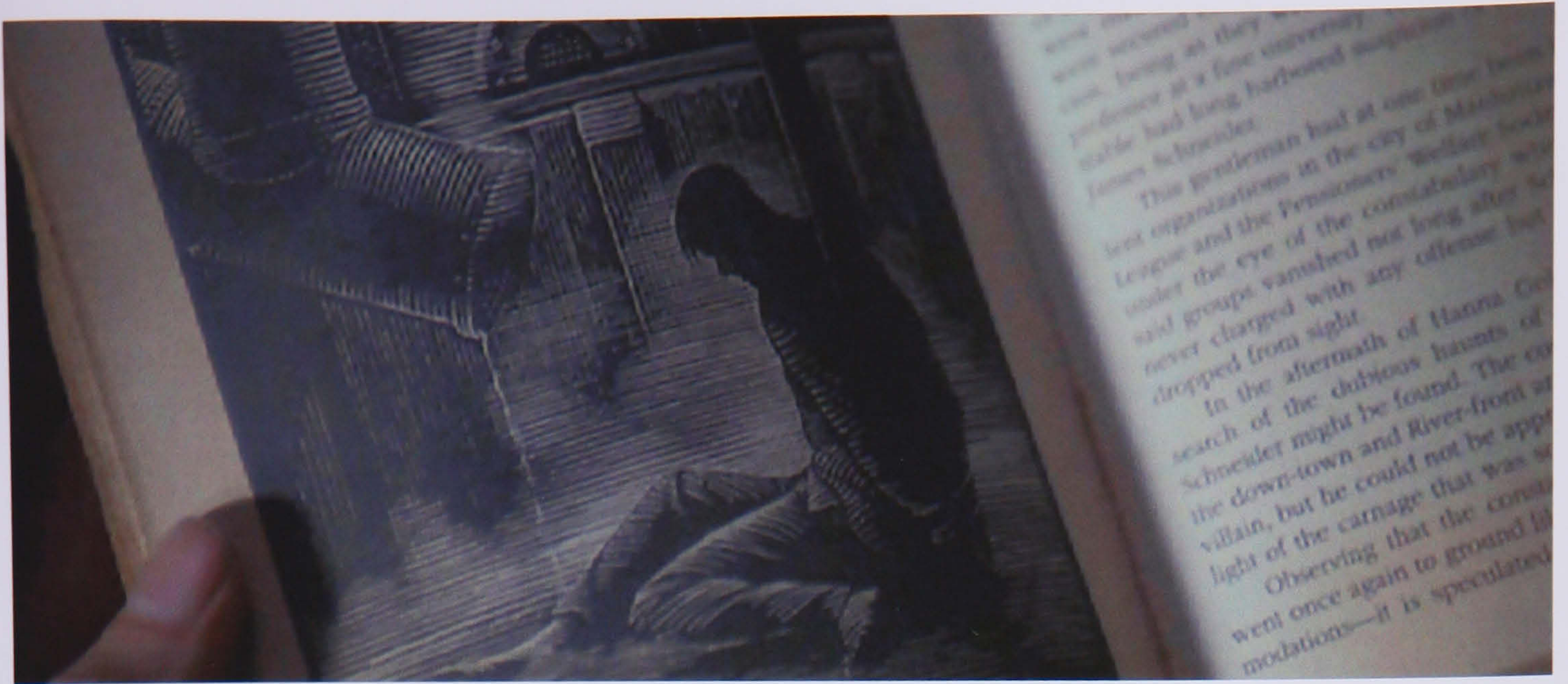


Figure 4.16 Artistic inspiration for murder in *The Bone Collector*



Figure 4.17 Staged recreation of death in *The Bone Collector*

torment of the victim before the staged deaths: the woman tied to the pipe is seen awaiting her fate and pleading as the killer ominously rolls down her sleeve, and a later victim is shown screaming as the killer cuts into him, as well as being savaged by rats. The film seems to feel the need to offer the suffering that the crime scene is a referent for. It is as if the subjection and control of the crime scene tableaux is inadequate without the artistic legacy. Lacking culturally accepted concepts of pain, it refers to itself.

To legitimize and compensate for the lack of cultural grounding, the filmmakers turn to heritage. The subterranean crime scenes are staged around old New York: the Woolworth's Building, a disused slaughterhouse, and an abandoned subway station.

Rhyme's apartment has visible brickwork, water pipes, and a visiting peregrine falcon, which is explicitly noted as being attracted to the architecture of New York's old buildings. Furthermore, the first victim of the serial killer is described as 'Mister "Rebuild New York"'. The inclusion of these references is more than mere window-dressing, it pinpoints the archaeological aspects of crime: the need to isolate strata of events and to perceive beneath the surface.

When Amelia is talked through examining the second crime scene via a radio link to Rhyme in his bed, she is reminded that 'crime scenes are three-dimensional'. The concepts of depth, layers and even dirt are all important to the crime scene, suggesting barriers to the critical investigator's gaze. Quite dramatically in *The Bone Collector*, Rhyme's gaze is restricted (by being bedridden), so Amelia is both a surrogate for him and us. As she proceeds in the darkness, her flashlight illuminates only small patches of dust, metalwork and decay. Even when the body is found, we struggle to see it through the steam, and like Rhyme, we wish Amelia would describe what she sees rather than stand mutely dazed. To justify her (and our looking), Rhyme reassures Amelia by saying the only way she can help the victim now is by 'working the crime scene'. We watch Amelia being repeatedly tempted to look at the scalded body tied before the open steam pipe, and the corresponding reverse point-of-view shot has the camera tracking ever closer to improve our vision of the spectacle.

Clues are found in the form of hair, wood and a bloody bone shard. Amelia wants to leave, but she still has to 'process the body' (in the context, a phrase that suggests processed meat). Hers is a duty of voyeurism on behalf of Rhyme, and we are obliged to look too. We are offered a series of point-of-view close-ups as Amelia describes 'old shackles', a chain around the fatality's waist, roped feet, and a large chunk of flesh removed from the arm. The spectacle of suffering, like those of the

Christianity-styled deaths, is founded on the contemplative look. The killer's control, via the artistry, demands she (and we) cannot dismiss it, and must read the body in pain for clues. The subject is static, and each shot is held for our scrutiny (on the pretext it is Amelia's). The conjunction of the aura of everything old, and the primitiveness of the deaths (the others include gnawing by rats and drowning), uses the implication, if not the exact iconography, of the torture chamber. Substituting for the Biblical iconography, it also evokes familiar expectations of pain. The artistry therefore has little sense of the beauty that some of the other films have. The art of the killer remains prevalent, but evidently, certain cultural capital is crucial for the transformation of horror into art. The fact that the killer is a corrupt forensics cop (having fabricated evidence), and has been working as a medical equipment technician for Rhyme, in other words, not part of the same cultural elite as his patient, is exposed by the ending of the film. His motive is revenge, for Rhyme had testified against him. Thus, when he finally attacks Rhyme, he claims, 'I played you.... I gave you every clue.... You failed.' But he too fails as a player. He has no artistry planned for Rhyme, only to cause a vegetative state for him (something Rhyme was determined to avoid via imminent suicide). His failure, thanks to Amelia arriving just in time to shoot the killer, leaves the film lacking any overarching formal splendour of murder.

It is apparent that *The Bone Collector* is less concerned with beauty, and more intent on stressing witnessing, and the art of detection. Through Rhyme being restricted to his room, a style employing high overheads of the city, and a specific shot that is an incredible combination of three zooms to go from an attack by the

serial killer in the street to Rhyme in his bed, the theme seems to be observation.³⁶ The situation is very much like a panopticon, stressing control by surveillance. If ever a structure or institution underscored the duty of looking, it was that. *The Bone Collector* operates as a validation of the investigator's (and our) desire to look at the suffering of the victim of the serial killer artist. Not so concerned as some about the exquisiteness of the artistry, the film is as adamant as any about the pleasures of reading the scene and deciphering the clues. What *The Bone Collector* therefore suggests, is that the artistry of the serial killer need not solely be about beauty, but that it forms part of a pattern of control founded on knowledge and enforced observation of the devastated body. However, for the most part, the aesthetics of recognizable suffering in the artistic serial killer subgenre are crucial for announcing the control. For the control to be declared by the posed body rather than the act of murder, the killer should, ideally, be versed in the aesthetics of pain.

The Power of Images and the Pain of Knowing

As we have established, the subgenre makes voyeurism a duty for both the investigating critic and the investigating (and the mentally and emotionally invested) spectator. But with the depiction of the attacks mostly avoided, and our absorption in the pursuit of clues when we examine the prone victim, do the films seek to divorce pain from the suffering body? Is our pleasure in any way linked to the devastation of the body? Or is the body lost behind a veil of potentially meaningful clues and information?

When Mr Blonde (Michael Madsen) tortures the cop in *Reservoir Dogs* (Quentin

³⁶ Interestingly, Phillip Noyce has said that his inspiration for the triple zoom came from a shot in another serial killer film, namely Hitchcock's *Frenzy* (UK, 1972) (see Noyce's commentary on the UK release in 2000 of the DVD of *The Bone Collector*). It would also seem appropriate to note that the overall structure of the film, with an incapacitated male, and a female acting as his surrogate eyes is not dissimilar to Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (USA, 1954).

Tarantino, USA, 1991), the severing of the ear is not shown. And yet, the force of the act is so traumatic, many spectators claim they see it. In a not too dissimilar manner, audiences often perceive *Se7en* as full of gruesome images, but none of the murders take place on screen until Doe is killed by Mills at the end, whilst the actual murder scenes that are shown, form little of the total screen time.

It is often cited that it is more frightening not to see horrible things than to see them, for there are ‘worse things in our imagination’. But such a strategy does not appear to be the aim of the subgenre. In spite of their brevity, the crime scenes in *Se7en* are all-pervading via their luscious attention to formal beauty, but also their constant narrative importance; the image of the scene cannot be forgotten in the manner a death in a slasher film can, for we must mentally (and sometimes visually) revisit them in the wake of new clues. Furthermore, we dwell upon the ravaged body. The stasis of the aftermath of murder allows the spectator time to sensorially interact with the image, a process that involves more than the imagination running riot.

Linda Williams in her article ‘Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess’ considers horror films, pornography and melodramas as being body genres: films that ‘both portray and affect the sensational body’ (1991, 4). Furthermore, although other film genres such as musicals and comedies also affect the spectator’s body, what distinguishes her trio is ‘the perception that the body of the spectator is caught up in an almost involuntary mimicry of the emotion or sensation of the body on the screen’ (L. Williams 1991, 4). Indeed, the very ‘success of these genres is often measured by the degree to which the audience sensation mimics what is seen on the screen’ (L. Williams, 1991, 4). For the most part, the murder scenes in the artistic serial killer subgenre can be regarded as being included within the category of the horror film, for they are frightening moments organized around dread and suffering, with intermittent dramatic revelations intended to shock the audience or make them wish

to recoil.³⁷ Therefore, if it is deemed to be a body genre, how might we feel what is seen on the screen?

We know from our own experiences how difficult it is to imagine someone else's pain. Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* has concisely articulated the gap as, 'To have pain is to have *certainty*; to hear about pain is to have *doubt*' (1985, 13). The inability to share knowledge of pain is, in Scarry's words, due to its 'resistance to language' (1985, 4). Building on work by V. C. Medvei, Scarry elucidates that a structure of referents is used to articulate pain. Thus, we either refer to an external agent, such as a weapon, or resort to a highly visualized concept of bodily damage; for example, I could say it feels like my arm is hanging off. Whilst the slasher films invoked both types of referents, but lingered on the former (gigantic carving knives, chainsaws, gloves with blades for fingers, etc.), the artistic serial killer films rely on the referent of the disfigured corpse. The latter have particularly contrived displays that are intended to express the pain of victimhood.

Joe Coleman, the notorious painter of serial killers, has contrasted his cathartically produced canvases with the work of actual murderers, stating 'there are certain types of pain that need expression. The expression has to be equal to the pain, it has to be as extreme' (in Fuchs 2002, 16). On a narrative level, the acute punishments in the films I have discussed reach the intensity necessary to enunciate the pain, as well as the killer's control over the victim. But I believe the contemplation of the viciously violated body, albeit within a framework of searching for clues, allows a more complete sensory response to the expression of pain.

Laura Marks in 'Video haptics and erotics' (1998) offers a response to video

³⁷ Of course, the subgenre does not exclusively fit into the horror genre. Also, it conforms to the crime story and police procedural narrative, and some of the films can be categorized as 'colour *noir*' (a loose category defined by a film's attention to the atmospherics of light).

images via tactile impressions, rather than optical recognition. Examining work by videomakers including Sadie Benning, Seoungho Cho and Tran T. Kim-Trang, Marks states the following: ‘In haptic *visuality*, the eyes themselves function like organs of touch. Haptic visuality, a term contrasted to optical visuality, draws from other forms of sense experience, primarily touch and kinaesthetics’ (1998, 332). The video medium is not incidental to the haptic quality though, for Marks is concerned with a texture to the image (a graininess or pixelation, a distortion due to focal length, and properties of contrast and exposure). Consequently, Marks contends that, ‘Haptic cinema does not invite identification with a figure so much as it encourages a bodily relationship between the viewer and the video image’ (1998, 332). Of course, the films of the subgenre I am investigating have highly individuated points of identification in the form of the victims, but Marks’s work is not redundant to my study.

In the frequent close-ups, the damaged body parts are isolated and can take on a presence beyond identification, for example, the various limbs shown separately in the crucifixion scene in *Resurrection* are reminiscent of the initially unidentifiable wound to Ballard’s neck in *Crash*. However, more usually, it is complete crime scenes that function as aesthetic manifestations of suffering, and only subsequently, do we individuate the elements and recognize the details of the corpse. In other words, we sense a beauty (and pleasure) of the pain and revulsion of the image, not the narrative function of the scene. *Se7en* is perhaps the film that comes closest to creating the moment as haptic cinema via its textural properties. Cinematographer Darius Khondji and director David Fincher used a technique of resilvering which results in desaturated colours and rich dense blacks. Furthermore, a quite strict range of colours was used (mostly creams, yellows, greys, beiges and browns) in conjunction with visible source lighting that struggles to penetrate the gloom of most

interior shots. The crime scenes themselves had their own colour signatures to match their crimes: the greasy world of Gluttony is an underexposed view of torches failing to pierce the brown gloom, Sloth has a green hue that Khondji has described as ‘like being under the bottom of a river’ (in D.E. Williams 1995, 40), and Lust is depicted as the red neon environment of a cheap brothel punctuated with white flashes of light to accompany the techno beat. Even exterior shots have an almost tangible consistency and oppressiveness, with virtually relentless rain dominating the first two-thirds of the film. The combined work of the cinematographer, director and production designer (Arthur Max) gives *Se7en* a textural presence that could be described as prompting haptic visuality. The images, and not just the subject matter, make our skin react. But *Se7en* is essentially an exception in the subgenre, for most of the other films possess less formal eloquence, and are quite conventional in their filmic texture. However, all films in the subgenre have a capacity to address the spectator viscerally as well as visually.

Vivian Sobchack in ‘What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh’ (2000), also argues that film ‘viewing’ is a carnal and sensual experience, as well as a visual (and of course, aural) one. Noting how we talk about films touching us and moving us, yet film theory has been reluctant to engage with such notions, Sobchack proposes that:

we do not experience any movie only with our eyes. We see and comprehend and feel films with our entire bodily being, informed by the full history and knowledge of our sensorium. (2000)³⁸

As a heightened example, Sobchack analyses the opening shot of Jane Campion’s 1993 film *The Piano*, where slender, bumpy shafts of blurred luminous pink oscillate

³⁸ Nelson Goodman makes much the same point about works of art when he states: ‘What we know through art is felt in our bones and nerves and muscles as well as grasped by our minds, that all the sensitivity and responsiveness of the organism participates in the interpretation of symbols’ (in Freedberg 1989, 25).

across the screen. Sobchack states that before her eyes could recognize the image, her fingers sensed its meaning. The objective reverse shot confirms what her fingers knew but her eyes did not: Ada was looking through her fingers; the pink lines were her digits, and we were seeing her view of them. Sobchack calls this her ‘body’s prereflective but reflexive comprehension of the seen (and, hence, the “scene”)’ (2000). Sobchack’s argument corresponds to David Freedberg’s description of the power of art to disturb via responses that ‘in some profound sense ... precede context’ (1989, xx).

The ambiguity of the opening image in *The Piano* may suggest that Sobchack, like Laura Marks, is particularly concerned with the textural characteristic of the image, but this is not so. Sobchack theorizes that some images can supplant direct identification with ‘the sense and sensibility of materiality itself’ (2000). Examining another scene from the film, where Baines sits under the piano and touches Ada, Sobchack finds that:

At that moment when Baines touches Ada’s skin through her stocking, suddenly my skin is both mine and not my own: the ‘immediate tactile shock’ opens me to the general erotic mattering of flesh and I am diffusely – ambivalently – Baines’s body, Ada’s body ... the ‘film’s body,’ and my ‘own’ body. (2000)

Although I would not take such a phenomenological approach as Sobchack, her idea is illuminating. As with Freedberg, Sobchack is arguing that a concentration on the formalism of a text (be it a film or a painting) saps it of its sensorial impact. The crime scenes of the artistic serial killer subgenre need to be read formally for evidence, but other clues reside in the sensorial responses. It is these very reactions the investigating critics seek from the crime scenes.

In *Manhunter*, Will Graham states, ‘I tried to build feelings in my imagination like the killer had’: he had to make himself vulnerable to emotions to decode the

crime. Similarly, in *The Bone Collector*, Rhyme, who of course cannot be at the crime scene, tells Donaghy, 'I want to know what you felt, what you feel, in the deepest recesses of your senses.' There are limits though. In *Se7en*, Somerset maintains, 'We have to divorce ourselves from emotion', and he is vindicated by the failure of Mills's approach of feeding off his emotions, which only lead him into confrontation with Doe. But Somerset's comment does not prevent his sensorial engagement. As Richard Dyer has pinpointed of Somerset, 'It is not just that he is erudite, but that he approaches the crime in terms of meaning, a meaning for which he has a feeling' (1999, 11). Dyer continues via an examination of the library scene I described earlier, and states 'Somerset seeks to grasp the sense of the murders' (1999, 11). The choice of words is telling, even if unintentional: to feel the crime is to understand it; the sense is in the sensation.

When Somerset and Mills reflect on the Greed murder (in which the lawyer Gould is forced to cut off a pound of his own flesh), the senior partner begins to sense the crime:

The killer would have wanted Gould to take his time, to sit and decide which cut to make first. Imagine it: there's a gun in your face. Which part of your body is expendable?

Somerset attempts to 'look through' the corpse and 'Edit out the initial shock'. He discovers that the killer is preaching via forced attrition not atonement, therefore the performed crime scene is directed towards the victim's subjugation, fear and endurance as evidence of the killer's control. Surprisingly, Dyer attests that *Se7en* seeks 'to avoid the reality of the victims' experience' (1999, 60); it is a strategy of denial that he advances as a feature of most serial killer films (see Dyer 1998). Although I concur with the general premise, I believe Dyer is imprecise in his phrasing, at least in respect of *Se7en*, and most of the other films in the artistic serial

killer subgenre. Certainly, the victim as a subject is virtually non-existent in the subgenre, but the experience of victimhood seems central.

Examining *Se7en* as an example of the subgenre, we find the prolonged meditations on the body and/or the murder scene confine our attention to the victim's suffering for much longer than most other serial killer films. Yet, Dyer attests: 'Only the doctor's words on Victor ("he's experienced about as much pain and suffering of anyone I've encountered, give or take") begin to open up the perspective of the victim' (1999, 60). However, even if we only concentrate on the case of Victor, we find the process began much earlier, back at the Sloth murder scene. The camera, like an insect the decaying setting suggests, crawls along Victor's body revealing sores and bulbous veins. The raw skin is reminiscent of the *écorchés* of the eighteenth century, and a member of the SWAT team even remarks, 'It's some kind of frigging wax sculpture or something' (figure 4.18). Somerset holds up photographs that offer a chronology of the degeneration and disintegration of Victor's body, and Mills scrutinizes specimen jars of hair, urine and fingernails as if they were *objets d'art*, but with our knowledge they must have been forcibly extracted. The doctor too has more to express, describing the deterioration of Victor's spinal muscles, his brain being mush, and how he had chewed off his own tongue (a process that indicates a multiple act rather than the swift singular action biting implies). I wonder how many spectators, without consciously thinking of it, sensed their tongue at this moment of the film; or when Somerset combs the hair up the wrong way on the Gluttony corpse felt prickles on his/her neck (figure 4.19).

These moments, and several others, appear to replicate Sobchack's description of a reflexive but prereflective moment. Even on the mortuary slab, when the opening close-up shot abstractly transforms the body into marble-like flesh of purples, blues and yellows, the sense of victimhood persists alongside the beauty; the bloody



Figure 4.18 Victor resembling an écorché at the Sloth murder scene in *Se7en*



Figure 4.19 Attempting to make the hairs on the back of the spectator's neck stand up by examining the head at the Gluttony murder scene in *Se7en*

stitching and the subsequent comment of the stomach bursting under Doe's assault ensure this is so. The border between this being pre- or post-reflective is unclear, and is not really of great concern to me. However, it strikes me that the scenes are very much about the victim's experience as a property of the artistry, even if the identity and subjectivity of the victim is never explored. As spectators, we shift between the investigator's and victim's experiences: we both search for clues and feel the visceral quality of the body as repository for clues. The artistry of the serial killer remains central, but alongside his creation of formal beauty is his ability to produce exquisite pain. Our spectatorial pleasures derive from both: we are alternatively (or simultaneously) critic and subject, even if the victim's body has coalesced into the

murderer's work of art. We find pleasure in the pain as well as the aestheticized spectacle of the controlled body.

It is noteworthy that the other murders in *Se7en* also enable a positioning of us, to some degree, as victims. The depiction of the Lust murder, although mostly avoiding the fate of the prostitute fucked to death via a savage dildo, puts us in the dilemma of the client who was forced at gunpoint to murder her. His pleas for help at the conclusion of his verbal re-enactment of his crime are as much the prostitute's as his. Pride, although briefly shown, tangibly displays the painful choice between death and living with disfigurement, and encourages a postulation on our part about our possible reaction if placed in such a scenario. And even Tracey's death, never shown, and her severed head only represented by a box, carries an emotional weight in the fact that she was pregnant; the murder of a woman bearing a child brings with it the cultural force of the shock felt in 1969 at Sharon Tate's murder by Charles Manson's followers.³⁹ The film therefore seems all too aware of victimhood.

Like the other films in the subgenre, pain of knowing exists via the senses, but it is not solely about the victim, rather the whole crime. As we have noted, many films attempt to stress the overwhelming smell of death, and in the Sloth murder, the room is decorated with Christmas tree-shaped air fresheners (figure 4.20). In the subgenre, the act of contemplation gives time for more than visual recognition, and even when quite brief (such as in the Lust murder), or when the body is missing (Greed murder), vivid descriptions and photographs are puzzled over and dwelt upon to encourage our reflection on suffering, which is the mark of the killer's control. Furthermore, when the images correspond to familiar iconography of suffering (Christian or

³⁹ The figure of Manson looms large throughout the film. The book *Helter Skelter* (which chronicled the Manson murders) is mentioned by Somerset as a possible book to be flagged up by the FBI if taken from a library. The slogans at the murder scenes, and displayed corpses also seem to reference events linked to Manson. And the film contains music by Nine Inch Nails, a band closely linked to Manson, notably through recording an album in his house (Dyer 1999, 53).



Figure 4.20 Christmas tree-shaped air fresheners suggesting smell and conceptual art at the Sloth murder scene in *Se7en*

torture), we are invited to ponder the sensorial properties of the scene. In the example of *Se7en*, the gravity of Catholicism and cultural references inculcate the Seven Deadly Sins with a level of agony far exceeding any specifics. In other words, even without knowing of the sins, the implied notoriety and cultural deployment of them, suggests their extremeness. It is hardly surprising then that David Fincher declared that he is ‘always interested in movies that scar’ (in Black 1998a, 145), and ‘was afraid people wouldn’t respond viscerally’ (in Taubin 1996, 24). Both the serial killer artists, and the films themselves, attempt to tap into the scarring or visceral interpretation of the posed body that has suffered. Art is once more imbued with a raw presence, alongside its formalism.

It therefore becomes clear that the artistic serial killer subgenre addresses the crime scene, the murderer, the investigator and the victim in quite significantly different ways to earlier depictions of the serial killer. The aestheticization and artistry provide the opportunity to investigate the controlled body and read it for clues. Reassuringly, the investigator becomes a critic to complement the killer’s artistry. He and/or she can decipher and make meaning of the world of the serial killer, a world where the murderous acts are frequently categorized as without

reason. The investigator, as possessor of privileged cultural knowledge, guides the philistine police officers, and us and reveals the 'who?', 'what?', 'when?' and 'why?' of the crime. 'Motiveless' crime is made comprehensible, not by confession or interrogation, but insight. In a quite reactionary way, via the serial killer representing all heinous crime, and the investigator resolving it, the fears of society can be seen to be contained. And yet, although the serial killer is usually caught in the films, such a reading is not secure. In *Se7en*, Doe gives himself up, and still completes his overarching project of seven murders; *Copycat* has another killer waiting to embrace the role; Lecter remains at large (in *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannibal*); in *The Bone Collector*, the killer had staged crimes before and the clues had gone undetected; and in *Resurrection*, the murderer had rehearsed his crimes with more victims in a different US state. The tone might be bleakest in *Se7en*, but all are tainted by the illusiveness of the serial killer.

Where the conservatism is more in evidence is through the importance of looking. Whether via the panoptic quality of characters like Rhyme or the FBI tracking library book withdrawals in *Se7en*, the subgenre advocates the usefulness of intrusive surveillance, as well as perpetuating a blind faith in FBI profilers, who one psychologist has charged with 'bastardizing their discipline with a lot of mumbo-jumbo, without really knowing what they are doing' (Russell Boxley in Newton 2000, 189). However, the notion of the investigating look has a more pertinent importance to the subgenre.

The duty of voyeurism obliges the spectator to confront the victim in a way most serial killer films do not, and although denuding the victim of any subjectivity (quite frequently we never see them as anything other than a corpse), their experience as a victim is expressed. Even though the suffering is missing, the act of contemplation associated with art, and in particular religious paintings, actually encourages a

dwelling on torment. In respect of paintings, Maria Tatar has argued that: ‘Cultural representations of victims of *Lustmord* reveal the brutal realities of what happened to the victims, but they also cloud issues of agency through their aestheticizing strategies’ (1995, 183). In other words, the body is there, but we see art. But this is not allowed to dominate in the artistic serial killer subgenre, for the spectator does not experience the murder scene as art alone, for it prickles with pain. The corporeality of the filmic image always resists the complete aestheticization of the crime, and the capability of the killer to provoke a carnal response in the investigator (and us the audience) is part of his form of control and artistry. Art is restored to a state that embraces both aesthetic formalism and raw sensorial reactions. The subgenre of the artistic serial killer cultivates a sensorial response beyond seeing, and through the artistry (both via and beyond), the spectator is faced with an actuality of suffering: his or her own moment of victimhood.

5. Playing with Control

Yes, these are bruises from fighting. Yes, I'm comfortable with that. I am enlightened.

The narrator (Ed Norton) in *Fight Club*

In this chapter, I wish to return to the theme of consensual masochistic pleasure, but the controlled body in question is markedly different. Rather than the palpable control of the BDSM top, the body modifier, and the artistic serial killer, the participants in the two films discussed in detail in this chapter enjoy relinquishing control, but within highly controlled situations: the play environ.

What makes the broad realm of play (which includes sport and games) so appropriate to my study is how it sits outside the restraints imposed by the culture it operates in. Using a model of play that applies the work of Johan Huizinga (1970) and Roger Caillois (1961), I will show that the site of play (both physically and metaphorically) is defined by its own set of highly structured rules. Further, I will seek to establish that it has recently been exploited within cinematic depictions for its potential to be both a rigidly controlled space, where it is safe to temporarily abandon control of the body, and a space that gives the appearance of offering the player unlimited control. The dual aspect, I will contend, bears a close relationship to recent cultural fluctuations and rearrangements in sources of gratification in play and sport, in particular, the growing participation in dangerous or extreme sports, and the proliferation of playing video games.¹

In respect of extreme sports, I refer to activities ranging from bungee jumping and extreme skiing to cage fighting and BASE jumping.² Previous films have touched on the subject. *Rollerball* (Norman Jewison, USA, 1975) and *Death Race*

¹ I am using video game as a generic term to include games played on arcade machines, computers (both online and offline) and video game consoles.

² Cage fighting and its associated sports such as extreme fighting and mixed martial arts are a form of few-holds-barred fighting involving punching, kicking and sometimes head butting. BASE is an acronym for Building, Antennae, Span (bridge), Earth (cliffs), and represents the fixed-objects from which BASE jumps, an extreme form of skydiving, are made.

2000 (Paul Bartel, USA, 1975) have explored the dangers of futuristic versions of a form of extreme sports, whilst *Point Break* (Kathryn Bigelow, USA, 1991) and *Cliffhanger* (Renny Harlin, USA, 1993) have used actual extreme sports as backgrounds for their crime narratives. However, neither strand of filmic representation has effectively dealt with the masochistic endeavour of the painful pursuits, but a recent film suggests the time may now be right to do so.

With regard to video games, these offer worlds purely constructed around rules, with the illusion of control for participants. The theme of environments designed around game rules is not entirely new to cinema, with *Westworld* (Michael Crichton, USA, 1973) being an obvious antecedent. More recently, films have directly taken their source from computer games. Thus, *Mortal Kombat* (Paul Anderson, USA, 1995), *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (Simon West, USA/Germany/UK/Japan, 2001) and *Resident Evil* (Paul Anderson, Germany/UK/France, 2002) have all recreated the characters, narratives and/or situations from video games. Furthermore, as Katie Salen attests in her study of Machinima,³

the language and style of game media have had tremendous influence on recent film direction and camera movement, ... [for example] the style and bullets of *The Matrix* [Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski, USA/Australia, 1999], the bamboo groves and airborne fight-dancing of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* [Ang Lee, China/Taiwan/USA, 2000], and the all-seeing camera eye in the first scenes of *Being John Malkovich* [Spike Jonze, UK/USA, 1999]. (2002, 99)

My interest though, is not so much in the storylines or the *mise-en-scene* (although these have important roles to play), but in whether the films attempt to replicate the

³ Machinima, as Katie Salen describes it, are 'animated movies made utilizing the client-side, real-time 3D rendering technology of game engines' (2002, 99). In other words, these are moving images, often with narratives, that recreate many of the aspects of cinema, but which utilize recording technologies embedded in the games. The technology and the way the machinima are composed and edited are frequently indebted to the modes of cinematic structure, and thus this is the reverse of cinema being influenced by the iconography of video games.

game play experience of action and adventure games,⁴ especially in relation to control.

Through noting the traits of contemporary extreme sports and video games, as well as recounting the comments of some of the participants, I will map a possible reading of the desires and pleasures articulated in two films directed by David Fincher: *The Game*, made in 1997, and the 1999 film, *Fight Club*. *The Game* features a wealthy businessman, Nicholas Van Orton (Michael Douglas), and his experience in a real-life game that appears to threaten his life. The world of the game denies him his well-ordered, heavily controlled lifestyle, and thrusts him into a battle of endurance and jeopardy. In *Fight Club*, the narrator, or Jack as he occasionally calls himself,⁵ suffers insomnia from subsisting in his numb corporate life. On meeting Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt), he finds cathartic happiness in the physical beatings of the Fight Club: a place where winning does not matter, and pain blurs with pleasure.

Both films address a masochistic pleasure of temporarily renouncing control within a play context. The two films are the exception in Hollywood, not the rule. But their existence, along with the play pursuits that inform them, gives credence to my overall contention that a fascination for the controlled body exists in Western culture. As Christine Ward Gailey has noted in her study of game media, ‘Games played in a society embody the values of the dominant culture; they are ways of reinforcing through play the behaviors and models of order rewarded or punished in the society’ (1993, 81). As witnessed throughout my survey, in spite of the interest in masochistic activities, the hegemonic order does not endorse them, so it is

⁴ Action games usually involve moving a character through a game world by a combination of running, jumping and climbing, with an objective of finding a way through to the next level of the game. Adventure games put a greater emphasis on exploring the world in a search for clues and to solve puzzles. The genres are far from distinct though, with both relying on direct character control, and games such as those in the *Tomb Raider* series (1996 -) being categorized as action adventure.

⁵ Henceforth, I will refer to the narrator as Jack in the interest of clarity, but will retain narrator when used by other writers.

unsurprising that most films mask the pursuit of pain in painful pursuits. But like the games themselves, Fincher's films offer a site of resistance where alternate pleasures may be produced.

At Play

When considering play, of particular interest to my inquiry is the way rules structure and bound the play space. Rather than a Marxist or carnivalesque critique, whereby the space confines and safely vents exuberance and violence, I am looking for the allure of the controlled environment. What are the pleasures normally associated with play, and how do the new variations of play confirm or impose different emphases on them? Most fundamentally, does the realm of play contain in its very structure a propensity for a pleasure in pain that is associated with the controlled body?

Johan Huizinga is adamant that play is foundational to a culture. In *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, first published in 1938, Huizinga declares that 'civilization arises and unfolds in and as play' (1970, 17). He proceeds by providing a pertinent and convincing model of the essence of play. Thus he states play is:

a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means. (1970, 32)

Roger Caillois would later criticize Huizinga for claiming play was secretive, instead preferring to categorize it by spectacle (1961, 4), and points out his neglect of gambling (1961, 5), yet his basic terms of classification remain remarkably similar:

play is free, separate, uncertain, unproductive, governed by rules, and make-believe (meaning an awareness of its difference from reality) (1961, 9-10). Thus, what I would suggest is conditional of play are the following properties: it takes place within its own reality, it has its own borders, is governed by its own rules, and it is a pursuit undertaken by freewill where uncertainty, or risk, are crucial. Thus, a slave gladiator fighting is not play, and so for my study, *The Running Man* (Paul Michael Glaser, USA, 1987), where contestants are forced to compete in an arena for a televised spectacle, immediately falls outside my remit. More inclusively, choice to enter into risky situations, whether physically challenging such as rock climbing, or emotionally demanding, like a game of chess, allows the notion of masochistic pleasure to come into play; the participant wants the challenge. That victory is the prime objective of play is beyond doubt for Huizinga (1970, 71), so it would be wrong of me to imply that he regarded it a masochistic enterprise in its own right. My contention is that the very properties that define play lend themselves quite effortlessly to being co-opted into masochism-driven games and sports: activities that marginalize the concept of victory, and even the concomitant aspects of honour and prestige.

Huizinga's characterization of 'the essence of the play-spirit' (1970, 72) is remarkably similar to those I and others have used to describe the masochistic pursuits in BDSM; Huizinga calls it a yearning 'To dare, to take risks, to bear uncertainty, to endure tension' (1970, 72). The BDSM scene is, as we have witnessed, governed by tension and its own set of rules (freely agreed upon by the bottom and the top), and it exists outside the conventional rules of society. Like Huizinga's definition of play, it 'is not "ordinary" or "real" life. It is rather a stepping out of "real" life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own' (1970, 26). Play and the BDSM scene are dependent upon rules defining limits. As

isolated spaces, they both provide a form of security regarding letting go of control, either to the anxiety or risk of losing, or being dominated. But the prescribed rules establish much more. Regulations, standards, precepts or directions, they all provide surety not available in the wider society. Huizinga again calls it accurately when he states that play,

creates order, *is* order. Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary, a limited perfection. Play demands order absolute and supreme. The least deviation from it 'spoils the game', robs it of its character, and makes it worthless. (1970, 29)

Likewise, Caillois argues, 'The confused and intricate laws of ordinary life are replaced ... by precise, arbitrary, unexceptional rules that must be accepted as such' (1961, 7). The rules hold the world together. For Huizinga, and Caillois concurs, even a cheat is better than a spoilsport who ignores the rules, for like the Emperor's new clothes, to not see the rules is to shatter the illusion of the world of play. In BDSM terms, it is like breaking the scene, for example by the top asking the bottom if s/he is okay. But like the BDSM scene, participants are free to say 'I am not playing anymore'. The significance then is that the play environment is a setting of control; it is so strictly ordered that the partaker can rely on outcomes. The trait of guaranteed reaction is, as we shall see, imperative to video games. However, this is not the only allure of play. Indeed, it is the attendant features of 'the liberating and isolating rules of play' (Caillois 1961, 50) that invite the risk and facilitate the pleasures of temporarily abandoning control.

Unlike Huizinga, Caillois places less emphasis on winning. He defines four main rubrics of play: *agôn* (competition), *alea* (chance), *mimicry* (simulation) and *ilinx* (vertigo, or a state or disorder such as dizziness) (1961, 12). The categories are not mutually exclusive, with some exceptions, and each operates on a continuum from an uncontrolled exuberance to a disciplined, organized enterprise. For our study, what

we need to note is that whilst *agôn* play, such as combat, can produce a clear winner, *ilinx* play, for example mountain climbing, is not so defined. Thus:

vertigo presupposes fear or, more precisely, feelings of panic, but the latter attracts and fascinates one; it is pleasurable. It is not so much a question of triumphing over fear as of the voluptuous experience of fear, thrills, and shock that causes a momentary loss of self-control. (Caillois 1961, 169)

It is society's increasing interest in *ilinx* play, even if within a competitive context, which seems to resonate throughout *Fight Club* and *The Game*: a pleasure in losing control and enduring. Caillois is right to note of all play however, that 'one does not play to win as a sure thing. The pleasure of the game is inseparable from the risk of losing' (1961, 173). In coming to his conclusion, Caillois shows both how elemental the desire is, and how intertwined the notions of control, pain and play are.

Describing a child, he points out the following:

He loves to play with his own pain, for example by probing a toothache with his tongue. He also likes to be frightened. He thus looks for a physical illness, limited and controlled, of which he is the cause, or sometimes he seeks an anxiety that he, being the cause, can stop at will. (1961, 28)

Caillois's explanation of the child's logic is a facsimile for the pleasures pursued by the characters in *Crash*, and those attained by Bob Flanagan through his performance art and life (as well as perhaps the gratification felt by all masochists). But it also provides a model for the play in *Fight Club*, and the sporting contract Nicholas Van Orton believes he is entering into in *The Game*. That the aestheticized suffering prompted by the artistic serial killer discussed in the last chapter does not correspond is no matter; we have already observed his game of providing clues amongst the murder scene of the controlled body. What is significant to note is the fundamentally playful quality of masochism as well as the masochistic propensity for play. And now that we have entered the world of play, we can begin to examine the specificities.

Sport

Sport, as an example of play, is set apart from the rest of society. It has sports stars, and sporting venues, the latter being spaces invested with great importance, which are used infrequently (a football stadium is used maybe twice a week),⁶ and have, for some, a sacred status (the 'hallowed turf'). Rules are devised and monitored by international organizations (for example, Fédération Internationale de Football Association and the International Olympic Committee), and whether played by professionals or amateurs, sport forms an important part of contemporary leisure time. But the classification of it as a pastime does not make it neutral. Sociological perspectives have interpreted sport positively via its ability to provide social skills. Thus, it is seen as integrating individuals into the society, and maintaining the social order by reinforcing norms and values (Hargreaves 1986, 2). In many ways, this is the story of *Rocky* (John G. Avildsen, USA, 1976), where the rebellious kid from the ghetto gets his big break through boxing. Conversely, sport has been construed as indoctrinating the lower classes into the ideology of the hegemonic order, whilst producing the labour force necessary for capitalist society. *Rollerball* depicts such an ideology. In a world run by corporations, violence is confined to a futuristic game combining basketball, roller hockey and a motorcycle wall of death. The sport is designed to have a social purpose: show the futility of individual action. However, when one player, Jonathan E. (James Caan), begins to attain star status, the corporation is forced to continually change the rules in an attempt to see him die in the arena. When questioned by Jonathan as to why he cannot continue, a member of the corporation explains: 'It wasn't meant to be a game, never.'

Of course, as John Hargreaves makes clear in his study of the role sport has

⁶ It is noticeable though, that the business function of sport is beginning to supplant the sporting one, with stadia being utilized for all manner of things (concerts, weddings, corporate functions etc.) when not being used for their intended purpose.

played in assimilating the British working class into the social order, both the dominant and subordinate groups develop and appropriate their own discourses in respect of leisure time and sporting activities, and so negotiate their own meanings. Such a situation typifies the bouts in *Fight Club*. These stand in opposition to commodified and globalized corporate sport, which can be defined by its rationalized structure of statistics and Taylorism-inspired search for perfection. Like most extreme sports, the involvement of corporations would threaten the essence of the fighting in *Fight Club*.⁷

But *Fight Club* is concerned with a broader commodification of sport. As Mike Featherstone states, ‘Within consumer culture the body is proclaimed as a vehicle of pleasure’ (1982, 177), with the subjugation of the human frame, through fitness regimes and body maintenance, considered worthwhile in the search for the body ideal.⁸ Featherstone’s work has shown that the pursuit of sport and dietary control are deemed in consumer culture to enhance sexual prowess, so that ‘exercise and sexuality are blurred together through neologisms such as “sexercise” and “exersex”’ (1982, 182). It is such a discourse surrounding sport and sexuality that *Fight Club*, especially in its opening two-thirds, engages with. The film asks, as does Jack as he looks at a poster of a sculptured six-pack of male abdominal muscles emerging from constraining Gucci underwear, ‘Is that what a man looks like?’

In his article ‘Sport in the Social Construction of Masculinity’, David Whitson comments that, ‘Sport has become ... one of the central sites in the social production

⁷ A recent television series examining extreme sports, *Xtremists* (2003), has identified how corporate involvement has both promoted and simultaneously threatened the sports. Whilst the *Red Bull* drink is synonymous with extreme sports via its sponsorship, and fits into the free spirit ethos, other corporate involvement inspired by their promotion of the sports has prompted *Red Bull* to rethink its participation. In other words, the lack of corporate identity is what has drawn *Red Bull* to extreme sports.

⁸ I retain an interest in the obsession with the honed and toned form of the body beautiful, which is a form of the controlled body, but as I stated in Chapter 3, my focus is on the immediate control, where pain is coded as part or all of the pleasure.

of masculinity' (1990, 19). As we witnessed with *Crash*, with reference to Richard Dyer's work on the male pin-up (1982), the image of a man posed for our inspection is legitimated by his frame being caught in action or his pose being associated with activity, a favourite being a sporting pursuit. Sport somehow changes the inspection of such images by the heterosexual male from ogling to admiration; like an enveloping prism, the sporting context refracts the gaze into some apparently higher order of viewing, far removed from the base, lustful gaze. So all-encompassing is the prism, that Western culture has a very different reading of an adolescent boy having a muscular, semi-nude sportsman on his wall to that of the same boy having a similarly dressed male pin-up. Masculinity and manly beauty are thus tightly intertwined with sport, not only for the sportsman, but also the spectator.

This Sporting Life (Lindsay Anderson, UK, 1963), with a powerful but hardly hunky Richard Harris in the lead role, notes the relationship between sport and the body beautiful. Having had several teeth smashed out in a violent rugby match, both his spurned admirer and his lover (who is also his landlady) comment that it has spoilt his looks. But in *Fight Club*, part of the appeal is to mark the body, something that equates the film closely with *Crash*. Chuck Palahniuk, author of the novel *Fight Club* is based on, comments:

I discovered that I'd never been in fights, and went, wow, that was sort of fun. That was a great release, and yeah, it hurts a little bit, but I lived through it. And it made me really curious about what I was capable of. (In Jeffries 2000, 8)

And retrospectively he noted, 'I realised that if you looked bad enough, people would not want to know what you did in your spare time' (in Jeffries 2000, 8). His point is twofold: firstly, society tries to ignore the healthy masochistic impulse that many (maybe all) people possess, and secondly, there is pleasure to be had in pain in certain situations, or as Palahniuk states, 'There's a redeeming value to taking a

punch under *controlled circumstances*' (in Jeffries 2000, 8; emphasis added). And here is the nub of the issue. Sport, with its attributes of rigid rules and defined spaces, both derived from the play ethos, is the perfect environment to engage in the pleasurable pursuit of pain. Indeed, much of the pleasure is derived from temporarily experiencing the discomfort of being dominated, pummelled to a pulp even, but knowing it will not go further than you desire; in other words, the rules dictate what the limits will be. This is BDSM in all but name.

What is also of note is that, in some quarters, there is an acceptance of Palahniuk's philosophy, and a move towards the aesthetics of pain. Thus, Amy Taubin has written in her review of *Fight Club*, '[Brad] Pitt ... has never been as exquisite as he is with a broken nose and blood streaming down his cut body' (1999a, 17). *Fight Club* appears to be marking a social shift, but one that mainstream cinema is still not sure it should recognize. Where *This Sporting Life* engages with the theme of hurting oneself (suicide and self-loathing), Frank (Richard Harris) is adamant he finds no masochistic pleasure in his sport: 'I don't enjoy getting kicked about a football field.... I only enjoy it if I've been paid a lot for it.' He can pick fights when greatly outnumbered, and deliberately stand under jets of cold water after a game, but regulated sport somehow makes it all different; indeed, such sport does not admit masochism, a fact the law in England more or less states.

During 1990-91, in what became known as the Spanner trial, sixteen men were prosecuted for taking part in BDSM activities.⁹ Although all had consented, and no permanent injuries were sustained, they were charged under the Offences Against the Person Act of 1861. At the first trial, the defendants were forced to plead guilty to assault, as Judge James Rant ruled that consent was no defence. Although it is

⁹ The Spanner case was named after the codename of the police investigation. For a full account of the trial see Bill Thompson, *Sadomasochism: Painful Perversion or Pleasurable Play?* (1994).

acknowledged in law that you cannot give assent to an assault, there are some exceptions. Kenny's *Outlines of Criminal Law* lists these to be 'justified by good reason, e.g., sport, lawful chastisement' (in B. Thompson 1994, 6), and Archbold's *Criminal Pleading Evidence and Practice* defines them as '(i) blows given in the course of a friendly athletics context; (ii) blows given in the course of rough but innocent horse play' (in B. Thompson 1994, 7). In other words, defining an action as sport changes the status of the action. But this is merely semantic deception, for the established rules of sport are simply control given legal backing.

That its distinction from BDSM is vague should not need to be laboured, but it is interesting to note the findings of Sabo and Panepinto's investigation into 'Football Ritual and the Social Reproduction of Masculinity' (1990). Interviewing male American Football players about their relationships with their coaches, they found a key element was pain, both as an initiation to prove courage and to separate the initiates from those outside the sporting group. Most telling was the finding that 'Interviewees enthusiastically shared stories of coaching techniques that "drove us to the limits"' (1990, 122), with one respondent excitedly proclaiming, 'He beat the shit out us and we loved him for it' (1990, 123). Utilizing pain to differentiate the group and develop internal cohesion is evidently important, and it is illuminating that it provokes strong emotions, but not surprising. Sport is one of the few environments where men are encouraged to show emotions, for aside from homosocial bonding, it is a space where men can cry (both supporters and players). Sport legitimates so many responses and actions that are denied in the rest of society, and the reason appears to be the very contained but also controlled atmosphere it takes place in. In a controlled space, you can allow yourself to lose control.

Team sports though are founded on very different principles to sports that do not have collective responsibility. When part of a team, any pain can be disguised behind

the belief that it was done for the good of all. Furthermore, most sports have the quest for victory as a justification for any suffering. Robert Kolker rightly notes that *Raging Bull* (Martin Scorsese, USA, 1980) ‘addresses the inscription of sadomasochism onto the body of an individual who punishes himself and others because he cannot understand or control either’ (2000, 211). However, the film is able to (superficially) dodge the issue of masochistic pleasure through justifying it as a quest for the boxing world championship. More than most films though, *Raging Bull* tackles the relationship of masculinity and masochism. Jake La Motta (Robert De Niro) admonishes his brother Joey (Joe Pesci) by calling him a ‘faggot’ when Joey refuses to hit him in the face when asked to. Even more than Frank in *This Sporting Life*, Jake wants to punish himself. Upset by his own limitations, he pleads with his brother to hit him. Jake has no answer to Joey’s question of ‘What does it prove?’ Obsessed with control, he loses his wife because he constantly doubts her faithfulness, and his world title through his inability to manage his weight. Jake’s masochistic punishment does not bring pleasure, only abusive self-destruction. The difference with *Fight Club* is that the latter film taps into the current cultural trend that appreciates and seeks out experiences that require a capacity to resist increasing personal suffering. Extreme sports provide such an opportunity.

David Le Breton, in ‘Playing Symbolically with Death in Extreme Sports’, outlines some of the properties and pleasures of the sporting pursuits. Concentrating on sports not involving a struggle with a third party, the work nonetheless offers a route into the desires and mindsets displayed in *Fight Club*, where winning is measured against personal endurance not victory over an opponent.

Le Breton’s description of the need for extreme sports, and the pleasures contained therein, is a template for the themes of numbed disillusionment and the search for personal fulfilment via suffering that Jack craves in *Fight Club*. Thus, Le

Breton states:

Constantly being called upon to prove themselves in a society where reference points are both countless and contradictory and where values are in crisis, people are seeking, through a radical one-to-one contest, to test their strength of character, their courage and their personal resources. (2000, 1)

Startlingly, Le Breton draws a strong parallel between these sports and the pleasures of BDSM, declaring ‘the more intense the suffering, the more the achievement has a reassuring personal significance’ (2000, 1). *Fight Club* and *The Game* borrow heavily from a similar ethos, so why do few other films?

Perhaps inherently, extreme sports, although visually exciting when shot in a documentary style (note the rise of the extreme sports television channel EX) offer little opportunity for cinematic narratives. Even a near equivalent film, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (Tony Richardson, UK, 1962), is orientated around interaction and not solitude, for it has a competitive race. Like *Fight Club*, the interior monologue is used to posit a battle with the self, and it too critiques consumerism, but it does not have the masochistic impulse that Fincher’s film has. *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* is denied the *raison d’être* that extreme sports have brought to the fore: the ‘paradoxical jubilation born of suffering overcome’ (Le Breton 2000, 6), a suffering you have initiated. Evidently, we have once again returned to the notion of control. Le Breton highlights its importance when he states that the thrill of ‘a mixture of fear and intoxication, of emotion and sensation’ comes from an individual being ‘immersed in an ordeal and *in control* of the danger being faced’ (2000, 2; emphasis added). If anxiety, stress and risk-taking are to be felt as pleasure, the individual has to have the freedom to submit or refuse, but it also requires what Le Breton calls ‘personal creativity’ (2000, 5). I will develop the idea further when I examine *Fight Club* in detail, but for now we should note it involves the splitting of the mind and body in a way that seems wholly fitting

to the film.

In Le Breton's most telling use of the language of the BDSM masochist, he states that the extreme sports enthusiast knows 'that the more scarred it [the body] is at the end, the more significant and more powerful will be the appreciation of the event' (2000, 5). In addition to the danger, the sportsman/sportswoman needs the body to ache during and after the extreme sport: the pain is part of the pleasure. Like the memory invested in body modification, BDSM pursuits, and even the marks on the artistic serial killer's victims, the participant in extreme sports has pain to testify to his existence and commitment. Chic Scott has said of fellow mountaineer Dougal Haston that he did not have a death wish, 'But I do think he did have a pain wish. There was something there in the pain and the suffering and the concentration of climbs that gave him solace' (in Connor 2002, 199).¹⁰ Comparably, Morverand who kayaked across the North Atlantic explained he was 'experiencing emotions that are denied us elsewhere' (in Le Breton 2000, 5), and Guy Delage, who swam the Atlantic, pledged beforehand that 'I want to experience pain after having experienced terror in a microlight over the Atlantic' (in Le Breton 2000, 5). Such objectives make extreme sports a profitable route into a study of the controlled body in *Fight Club*.

Video Games

The video game may seem worlds away, virtual worlds at that, from extreme sports, but it seems to negotiate the same territory of control. These similarities I will come to shortly, but first we should note that unlike extreme sports, video games have had quite an impact on cinema in recent years. The timely release of *The Matrix*

¹⁰ In 1975, Dougal Haston, along with Doug Scott, were the first men to climb the South-West Face of Everest, and they were forced to spend the night on the summit in a snow hole without oxygen, food or sleeping bags, but survived. Four years earlier, Haston had declared: 'I never really think about dying on a mountain, although I concede the risks are always there. That's part of the game. But never forget this is a pretty disciplined sport. You know you are going to get into awkward situations, and that they will call for self-control and concentration' (in Connor 2002, 201).

Reloaded (Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski, USA/Australia, 2003) and the video game *Enter The Matrix* (2003), the narrative of which briefly intersects that of the movie and contains extra footage featuring the original cast, shows the strong interrelationship between the media formats. The slow-motion fight sequences from the film fit seamlessly into the playable environment of the game as ‘bullet-time’,¹¹ and the premise of a virtual reality created by computer technology is equally easy to incorporate. Other films too have drawn on the exaggerated grammar of video games, especially the breaking of gravitational laws, for example *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, but the circular structure of the indebtedness is revealed by the games themselves being inspired by the work of directors such as John Woo and Sam Peckinpah.¹²

Conversely, the increasing use of cut scenes between the segments of interactive play in video games, including full motion video (FMV) sequences featuring live actors, shows the influence of cinematic imagery. But films are not games and games are not films. A survival horror game such as *Resident Evil* (1996) might borrow heavily from the camera angles, lighting, sound and action sequences of the George A. Romero zombie films that inspired it, but what makes them games is their interactiveness.¹³

Films such as *Mortal Kombat*, *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* and *Resident Evil*, which are derived from video games, have, as Kim Newman notes, ‘disappointingly

¹¹ Bullet-time had previously featured in other video games such as *Max Payne* (2001).

¹² We could also note at this point that David Cronenberg’s *eXistenZ*, which features a particularly visceral form of computer game, was partly sponsored by the video console manufacturer Sega (Poole 2000, 23), even though no game was ever made for retail.

¹³ Films and games differ in many other ways too. In games, music can be used for tension, but does not have the same relationship to the image as that in a film where the score is written to complement predetermined visual images. In addition, real-time interaction necessitates no montage in games (although edits can take place via pseudo camera placements in relation to the game geography, and can often be used for effect, such as hiding significant detail). Games also use quasi-filmic techniques to simulate pans and tracks. For more details on the comparisons of film and video games see Steven Poole (2000, 78-102).

adapt[ed] the content rather than the structure of their inspiration' (2002a, 220).¹⁴ It is noticeable though that *Resident Evil* does attempt to replicate some stylistic features from its respective video game series, namely the confined spaces, and highlighting certain objects, via colour and placement, to replicate those in the game that characters would interact with to further the narrative, for example, coloured viruses and chemicals (see figures 5.1 and 5.2).

The race against time narrative is also a framing device familiar from video games, where it is either used for the whole game to achieve a high score, or for sequences where a character will die if an objective is not achieved within the time limit. A film that attains a strong comparison with the format, although not modelled on an actual video game, is *Battle Royale* (Kenji Fukasaku, Japan, 2000), in which a group of school children are taken to an island and ordered to kill each other as part of a deterrent for delinquency. A time limit of three days is set for one person to be left alive, if not, they will all die. Each character has a different weapon (a common way of defining protagonists in video games), with winners of battles noting their progression through the game by accruing captured weapons, and the cinema screen flashing up titles showing the body count as if it was an interactive experience. The film fits into the broader category of games with hunted humans, which includes *The Most Dangerous Game/The Hounds of Zaroff* (Irving Pichel and Ernest B. Schoedsack, USA, 1932), *La decima vittima/The Tenth Victim* (Elio Petri, Italy/France, 1965) and the recent film *Series 7: The Contenders* (Daniel Minahan, USA, 2001), which satirizes reality shows by having lottery 'winners' forced to hunt each other. Fundamentally, most of these films, including *Battle Royale*, deny any masochistic pleasure in the gameplay, offering salvation or riches as their reward.

¹⁴ The film version of *Resident Evil* nearly completed the full circle of intertextuality, with George A. Romero writing an early script for the project before dropping out.

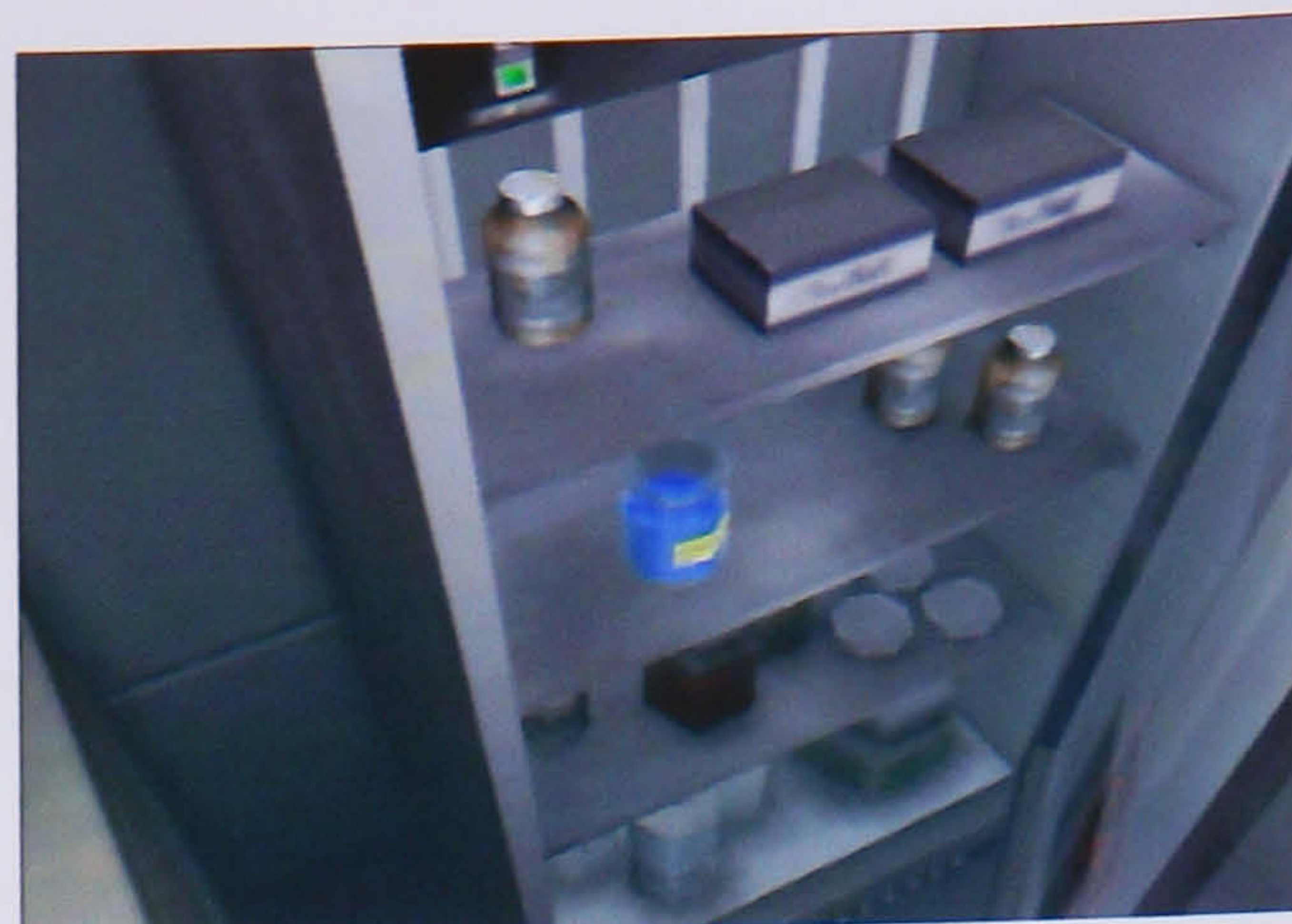
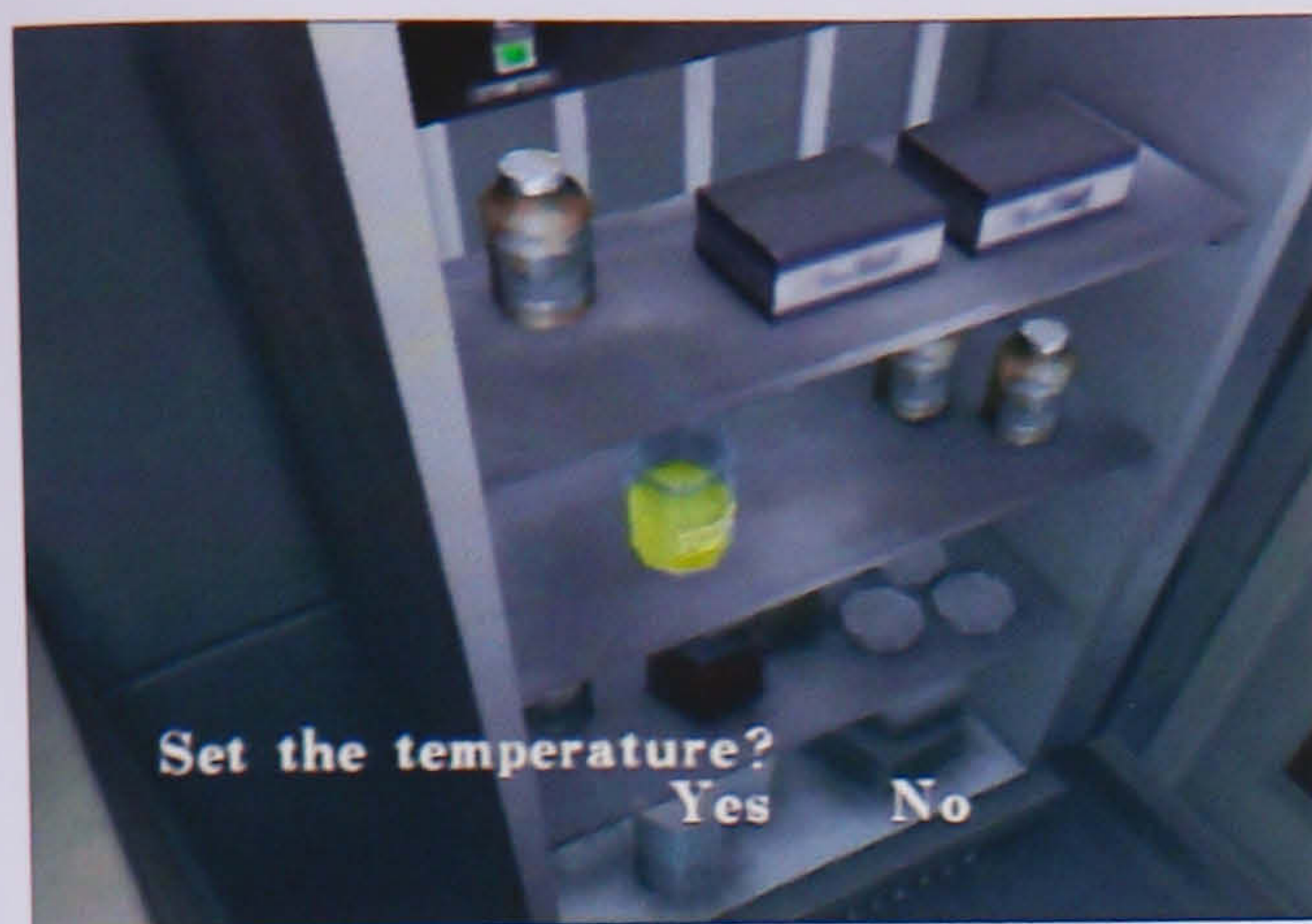


Figure 5.1 Visually coded information of a usable object in the video game *Resident Evil – Code: Veronica X*

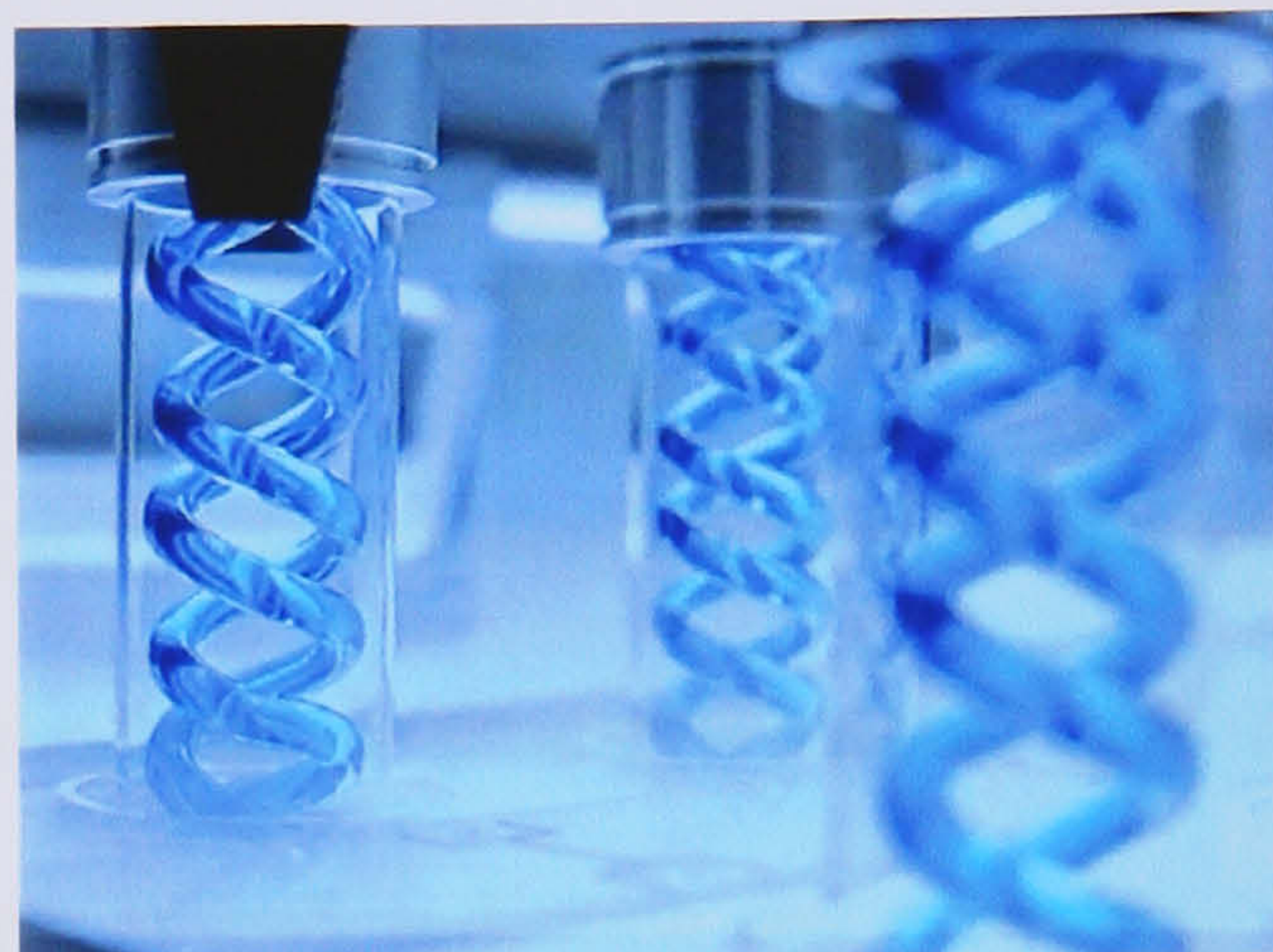
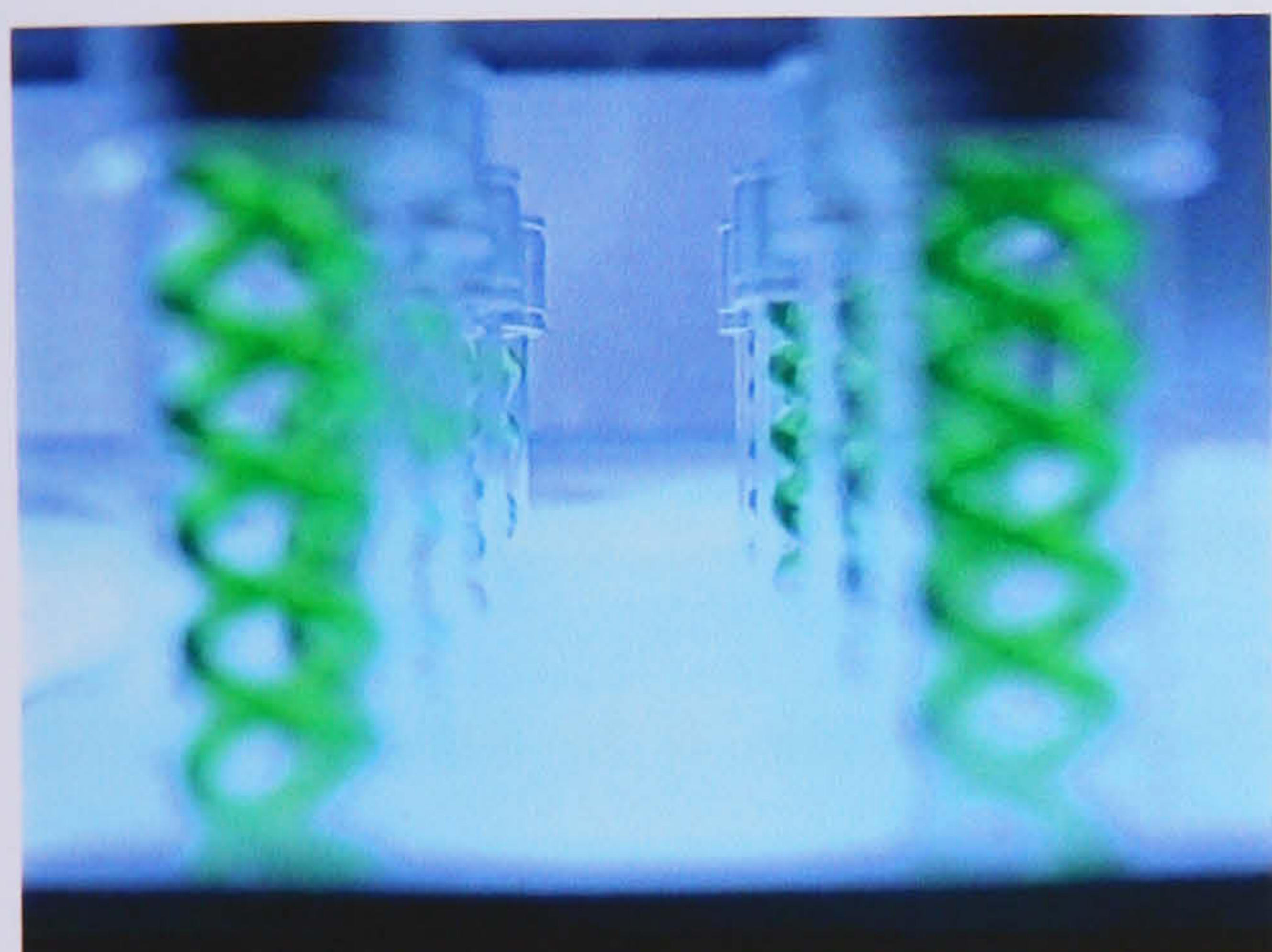


Figure 5.2 Replicating the video game colour scheme in the film *Resident Evil*

Equally, these films, and the adaptations mentioned earlier, only attempt a superficial replication of the video game style.

To make a movie more than merely inspired by a video game, it needs to embrace an aspect that makes it different, and Kim Newman is right to pinpoint that ‘Computer, video and role-playing games have informed such set-the-counter-to-zero-and-start-again films as *Groundhog Day* [Harold Ramis, USA, 1993], *Run Lola Run* [aka *Lola Rennt*, Tom Tykwer, Germany, 1998], and *Memento*, which might literally have been inconceivable otherwise’ (2002a, 220). In other words, they replicate the repeatability of video games, where you go back and try to succeed where you previously failed. The area of repetition and its impact on film narratives requires further investigation, but it falls beyond my remit. My concern for the remainder of this section is the idiosyncratic pleasures founded on danger and control

facilitated by playing video games, and to map out how *The Game* might interpret them in the filmic context.

Analysis of the dangers of video games has traditionally been ordered around a kind of moral panic. Leslie Haddon in 'Interactive Games' notes that in the USA 'the Surgeon General issued a warning that video games might be dangerous and that children might find them addictive' (1993, 137), and in the UK the MP George Foulkes put forward the 'Control of Space Invaders (and other Electronic Games) Bill' to control their use (1993, 137-138). Concerns raised ranged from the congregation of youths in game arcades, to the contradictory belief that video games made people anti-social. Other fears centred on the desensitization to violence and the production of a mass of youths highly dextrous at aiming weapons.¹⁵ Other dangers perceived in video games took the form of their reflecting and promoting a gender divide through their featuring strongly male-focused themes. As Alloway and Gilbert define it, video game culture is 'an arena within which to learn and to practice the "doing" of masculinity' (1998, 96).¹⁶ However, many of the gender issues have been contested in recent studies (see Gailey 1993), especially in respect of role-play. Steven Poole records that 'it is much more common for European men to play as women or as Korean ju-jitsu experts than as digital avatars of their own ethnic origins. It doesn't matter who you are in real life; here, the idea of play as experimentation extends to your own genes' (2000, 46).¹⁷ The game space, like the play space of BDSM, is therefore a place for gender play and controlling identity. It is this facility for the video game to be a site of experimentation, especially in the

¹⁵ The argument appears to have some validity, with the police and military in the USA using video game-like point-and-shoot devices known as Fire Arms Training Simulators (see Clive Thompson 2002). But the issue should perhaps not be about potential but intent.

¹⁶ See also Skirrow 1986.

¹⁷ A recent study by Nottingham Trent University found 15% of online role-playing gamers took part in virtual cross-dressing (in Poole 2003, 52). Further, the appeal to males of the *Tomb Raider* series of games, featuring Lara Croft, is an indication of the ability to cross identify.

context of the dangers within the game, not of the game, that make it relevant to the study of the controlled body.

When playing a video game, a person is both audience and participant. Gillian Skirrow describes the situation as follows: 'The viewer is in a separate space but appears to be in the position of co-creator, or subject to which everything else is the predicate' (1986, 130). In effect, there is split subjectivity, with the additional effect that in a real-time game, a small movement of the thumb can have an immediate and proportionally exaggerated movement in the game world. The player is thus an agent of control, with an instantaneous and magnified impact on the world, and the potent responsiveness leads to immersion. Recent developments such as Sony's Dual Shock Controller, which vibrates in the player's hands at appropriate moments in the game (e.g. a heartbeat in *Metal Gear Solid* (1999), or when a car corners during many racing games), may aid the correspondence, but it is the movement on the screen that most suggests the link between image and participant.

The element of control is a primary allure to game players. Alice Taylor recalls her first experience of a computer game like this: 'Stuff on the telly that you control, wow' (2002, 56). Christine Ward Gailey's interviews and observations of parents and children playing games on the Nintendo games console found a comparable situation:

The new video games offer a way of closing out the real world, on one level, and controlling conditions not ordinarily in one's control, on another.... This sense of being in control in a society where such feelings are rare in everyday life, was a theme expressed by most of the adult players. (1993, 83)

With control a key factor, it is not coincidental that the sentiment of a world where you have no control is expressed throughout *Fight Club*, with the bouts seen as a space to recapture that sensation. *The Game*, on the other hand, takes a different approach. Nicholas Van Orton is defined as a control freak, and is reluctant to accept

his brother's birthday gift of participation in the 'game'¹⁸ on the basis that he 'hate[s] surprises'. In the 'game', Nicholas is to experience many of them, and not be in control. So how does the video game, a space defined by participants as a space where they have control, correspond to his experiences?

The clue lies in the structure of video games. Rather than the player controlling the character, it is more accurate to think of the game being in control. Randy Schroeder claims that, 'Video games provide none of the open-endedness of regular play' (1996, 144), and the opinion emerges from the comment by Eugene F. Provenzo Jr. that dialogue with the video game is 'defined primarily by the computer and the way it has been programmed' (in Schroeder 1996, 144). What they are both referring to is how the virtual worlds in the games have boundaries to their space and rules regarding action. For example, in *Tomb Raider II* (1997), Lara Croft might need a key to open a wooden door, and nothing else will open it, not even repeatedly shooting it with twin pistols. Furthermore, as Henry Jenkins and Kurt Squire discuss in 'The Art of Contested Spaces', games are designed to structure a character's movements. Some have "hard rails", which tightly structure the player's movements to unfold a predetermined experience, and [there are] those with "soft rails", which are multidirectional and multilinear' (2002, 69). Citing Tim Shafer of LucasArts, they conclude that 'the challenge of game design is to "lead the player along" a predetermined pathway without "making them feel that they are being controlled"' (Jenkins and Squire 2002, 69). Thus, the player is controlled, rather than fully in control.

Video games do provide a pleasure of control, and it is the pleasure of control found in play, but a play where more than any other, the rules are adhered to. In a

¹⁸ To avoid confusion, when referring to the specific game experience undertaken in *The Game*, I will place the word in single quotation marks.

pure rendition of play, the video game offers a safe environment to risk losing control of yourself (or at least your point of identification). If your on-screen character ‘dies’ when you do X, you know to try Y next time: it is a forgiving environment that invites experimentation and risk by its surety of hard and fast rules. The pleasure then, as articulated by Nolan Bushell, the founder of Atari video games, is that it ‘is a completely controllable and understandable universe that is predictable. Much more controllable than real life’ (in Poole 2000, 183-84). This is the essence of play as defined by Huizinga and Caillois. There is the added bonus too, especially in role-play games, that the individual is invested with power to have an effect, and the player’s ‘actions always have deterministic consequences for characters or events’ (Poole 2000, 54). All actions therefore have meaning, and so enhance the feeling of control.

Predictability would soon get boring on its own though, so somewhat contradictorily, the controlled environment must involve jeopardy. Gillian Skirrow believes the attraction of video games for men and boys to be the boundary ‘between anxiety and pleasure’ (1986, 118). Similarly, Steven Poole finds ‘that one crucial component of videogaming pleasure is in fact a certain level of anxiety’ (2000, 181). In adventure games, it necessarily involves the character in whom you invest emotions, and are anxious about protecting. When your character dies in *Resident Evil – Code: Veronica X* (2001) the screen reads ‘You died’ (figure 5.3), and I know from my own experience of playing the PlayStation version of *Doom* (1995), that my partner has commented ‘you’re bleeding’. Obviously, the situation is much more pronounced with identifiably human characters, but one set of commentators investigating the ‘Nintendo generation’ were correct when they stated ‘children today are still experiencing early death. They are losing their lives and dying over and over again’ (Green, Reid and Bigum, 1998, 19). Although, as they note, these are

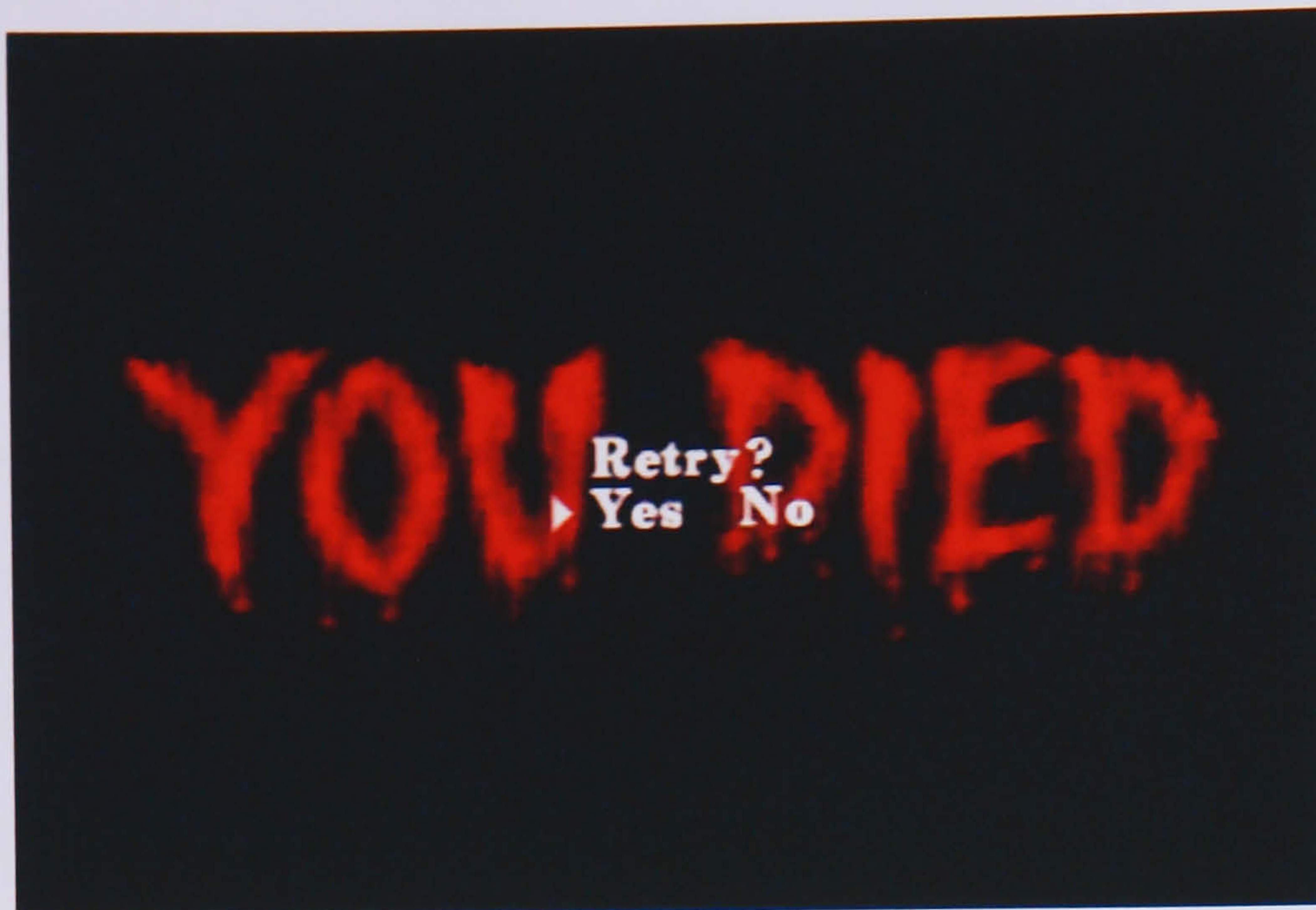


Figure 5.3 Repeating the ordeal of dying in the video game *Resident Evil – Code: Veronica X*

only electronic deaths, to develop the skills to complete the game you need to subject yourself/character to repeated ordeals. Frequently, the process requires a trade-off between reducing the credit on your character's health scale ('dying'), and succeeding in your pursuit, an example being Lara Croft will injure herself jumping out of a pit of spikes, but it is the only means of escape. The games therefore operate on a risk and reward basis. Consequently, you must suffer anxiety as you subject your character to danger to see if you can complete the game: a strategy not dissimilar to extreme sports. And like the physical recreations, most adventure video games are single-person games, where there are no victors. (In some, you can record a high score, but that is all.) The pleasure is the fear of 'dying', the enduring of anxiety, and the completing of the challenge. What the video game offers is a space, highly controlled, where you experience what is denied in much of the rest of society: a place to securely feel anxious and in danger. Of course, funfairs and cinemas offer an element of the feeling too, but without the same personal investment; *The Game* attempts to tap into the video game strategy, and applies it to cinema.

Relinquishing Control

By its very title, *The Game* announces its concern for the realm of play, the world of different rules, the space for temporarily abandoning control. The ‘game’ itself is not traditional play, it fuses elements of extreme sports with the structure of a video game, and in turn, the pattern of electronic play defines the narrative trajectory. John Brancato, one of the writers, describes it like this: ‘[It is] a series of decision trees.... A lot of [the film’s] logic isn’t traditional narrative but rather decision trees and game theory’ (in Swallow 2003, 111). Janet Maslin saw this as a negative feature, believing ‘the film has the steady momentum and flat trajectory of a video game’ (1997, 1). But it is the formal properties of the video game that enable the film to explore the pleasures of relinquishing control. My investigation is therefore intended to reveal what *The Game* raids from the video game logic of play, and how this helps offer a comparable space of controlled loss of control, which facilitates a pleasure in pain. To appreciate the structure, it is necessary to briefly outline the opening scenes of the film, and indicate the film’s concentration on issues of control and decision-making structure.

Fincher has stated, ‘If this movie is about anything, it’s about loss of control’ (in Swallow 2003, 91). That the control is central is confirmed by the introduction of Michael Douglas as Nicholas Van Orton, a highly successful, but repressively domineering, business tycoon. Enhanced by the inter-textual knowledge of his Oscar-winning role as the ruthless Gordon Gekko in *Wall Street* (Oliver Stone, USA, 1987), the workaholic Nicholas personifies regimented control as he monitors the business markets wherever he is: home, car or office. Even to call his mansion a home overstates its domicile traits. His shoes echo on the hard floor, and the kitchen, with its white brick-like tiles and dripping tap, gives an impression of an ordered institution. At the office, he maintains his rigid isolation by rebuffing an employee’s

happy birthday wish with the comment 'I don't like her.' Now forty-eight, he is the age his father was when he plunged from the roof of their house: a trauma Nicholas evidently witnessed.

His ordered life has been immediately unsettled by the return of his prankster brother Conrad (Sean Penn). At his club, Nicholas is first embarrassed by Conrad playing a practical joke, before suffering his brother orchestrating the waiters and waitresses in a serenade of 'Happy Birthday'. But what will throw Nicholas's controlled world into chaos is Conrad's birthday gift of an introduction to Consumer Recreation Services (CRS), for what he calls 'A profound life experience.'

Reluctantly accepting the offer, his protective layers of control are immediately stripped away. Initially forced to wait at the CRS reception, something he appears unaccustomed to, when he is finally dealt with, an apparently unprofessional employee, Jim Feingold (James Rebhorn), asks Nicholas to hold his take-away lunch whilst he collects the paperwork. An impatient Nicholas is offered vague answers about the nature of what Feingold calls the 'game'. Told it provides 'whatever's lacking', Nicholas attempts to assert authority by asking what happens if nothing is lacking, before questioning, 'Do you really think that I will participate without knowing anything?' Yet, rather than leave, Nicholas undertakes a seemingly never-ending series of intrusive medical and psychological tests; the game is beginning to take charge of his life, and he is forced to cancel a business meeting just to complete the succession of examinations.

Away from CRS, the game remains an enigma. A past participant merely describes it with the cryptic reference, 'John, Chapter 9, Verse 25. Whereas once I was blind, now I can see.' His interest heightened, Nicholas's potential to control the situation (to play, or not to play) is immediately denied him, as he is brusquely informed that his application has been rejected. Humiliated, he lies to Conrad that he

is too busy to participate. Returning home, he finds a clown dummy sprawled in his driveway exactly as his father had been after he had fallen from the roof. In its mouth is a key marked CRS.

Unaware the clown contains a camera, Nicholas takes it into the library, whereupon the television newscaster addresses him directly, explaining the key is the first of many, and Nicholas needs to be alert to discover more, and opportunities to use them. Doubt remains though as to whether the game has started, for the television reverts to the normal broadcast when the housekeeper enters the room. As for the objective of the game, Nicholas is merely told that solving *that* is the object of the game. What is thus established is that Nicholas is no longer fully in control, having obviously brought the game into his home. The sentiment is confirmed by the ironic close-up of the display on the security alarm that reads 'house secure'.

The next day, the game begins in earnest when Nicholas's overreaction prompts the sacking of a clumsy waitress called Christine (Deborah Kara Unger). Following her because a note tells him not to let her get away, they are both bundled off in an ambulance as witnesses to a man collapsing in the street. At the hospital, the lights go out, everyone, except Christine, runs off, and their only way out appears to be via a lift, which starts when Nicolas uses the CRS key. What is most interesting about the sequence is that Christine surreptitiously takes control. She reveals the ambulance is full of props, and chooses the direction they leave by, and although Nicholas questions her reasoning, he follows. For the remainder of their escape, she initiates: inviting Nicholas to climb out of the lift hatch when the elevator stops, telling him to run when they trigger an alarm in the CRS building they discover themselves in, and she knows they should watch out for nails and rats in the abandoned building, and that there should be a fire escape. To conclude their getaway, she is the one that falls first into one of the twin dumpsters that are

conveniently below the broken fire escape. She acts like a guide who prompts Nicholas through the first level of the game. Subsidiary characters in video games perform similar functions to Christine, for example, Von Croy in *Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation* (1999) and Otacon and Colonel Campbell in *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (2001) tell you/your character what to do at various stages. Rather than mentors, they act as guides, informing you/your character of the action you should follow. By subtly being pushed to go first (via the pretext that Christine cannot climb ahead as she is not wearing knickers), Nicholas is made to feel in control (just as in a video game). Further, the jumping from ledges and clambering through windows makes the opening of the ‘game’ very similar to platform video games such as *Donkey Kong* (1981), but with quest elements like those of *Tomb Raider* (figures 5.4 and 5.5). In other words, the hanging from precarious places is an ingrained aesthetic of suffering in such video games; and as with video games, Nicholas’s ‘game’ has ‘rails’ that have shepherded him on a specific trajectory.

The very premise of the ‘game’, namely collecting keys to be used at specific moments, is a staple of many video games. By rationing when doors/locks can be opened, it produces a ‘hard rails’ structure that ensures only certain routes in the game are available to the player. Although Nicholas’s game has ‘softer rails’ than that (he could track down Christine’s home much earlier than he does), the film uses the same motif for structure. Noticeably, *The Game* also utilizes innocuous items for important roles in the ‘game’, and they function like the objects characters collect and interact with in adventure video games. Thus, the CRS pen Nicholas is given leaks in his pocket, increasing his anxiety levels before his important business meeting. There he is unable to unlock his briefcase, even with the CRS key (was there another one he could have found?), and so cannot issue the severance contract to sack his business partner Anson Baer (Armin Mueller-Stahl). Consequently, he



Figure 5.4 Climbing between balconies and fire escapes in the video game *Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness*



Figure 5.5 Replicating the climbing from a platform video game in *The Game*

displays a frenzied loss of control as he smashes the briefcase, but only when he is securely away from Anson. The case, along with a shoe, would later be lost during the escape from the hospital; Nicholas is quite literally stripped of his controlled lifestyle.

The prime example of a usable object in the film is the handle Nicholas finds (figure 5.6). He only discovers a use for it later when he is locked in the back of a taxi and driven at speed into a harbour. As the car sinks in the water, he says to himself, 'It's a game. It's a game,' at which point he realizes he needs to use the handle to unwind the window and escape (figure 5.7). The purpose of each object



Figure 5.6 Discovery of a usable object in *The Game*



Figure 5.7 Discovering the use for the usable object in *The Game*

therefore has to be discovered as Nicholas journeys through his game. And the cinematic style usually emphasizes the object by having Nicholas inspect it or displaying it in close up (figures 5.8 and 5.9). Even the seemingly insignificant take-away carton handed to Nicholas by Feingold prior to his application interview provides the clue to resolving the game.

For Nicholas, the game functions like a video game by putting him at the centre of the events. He appears in every scene, and things happen to him, and as a result of what he does. Nicholas is used to wielding power, so Jonathan Romney is correct to note that the newscaster appeals to Nicholas's narcissism via the comment, 'This is your game, Nicholas' (1998, 40). However, it also equates to Steven Poole stating

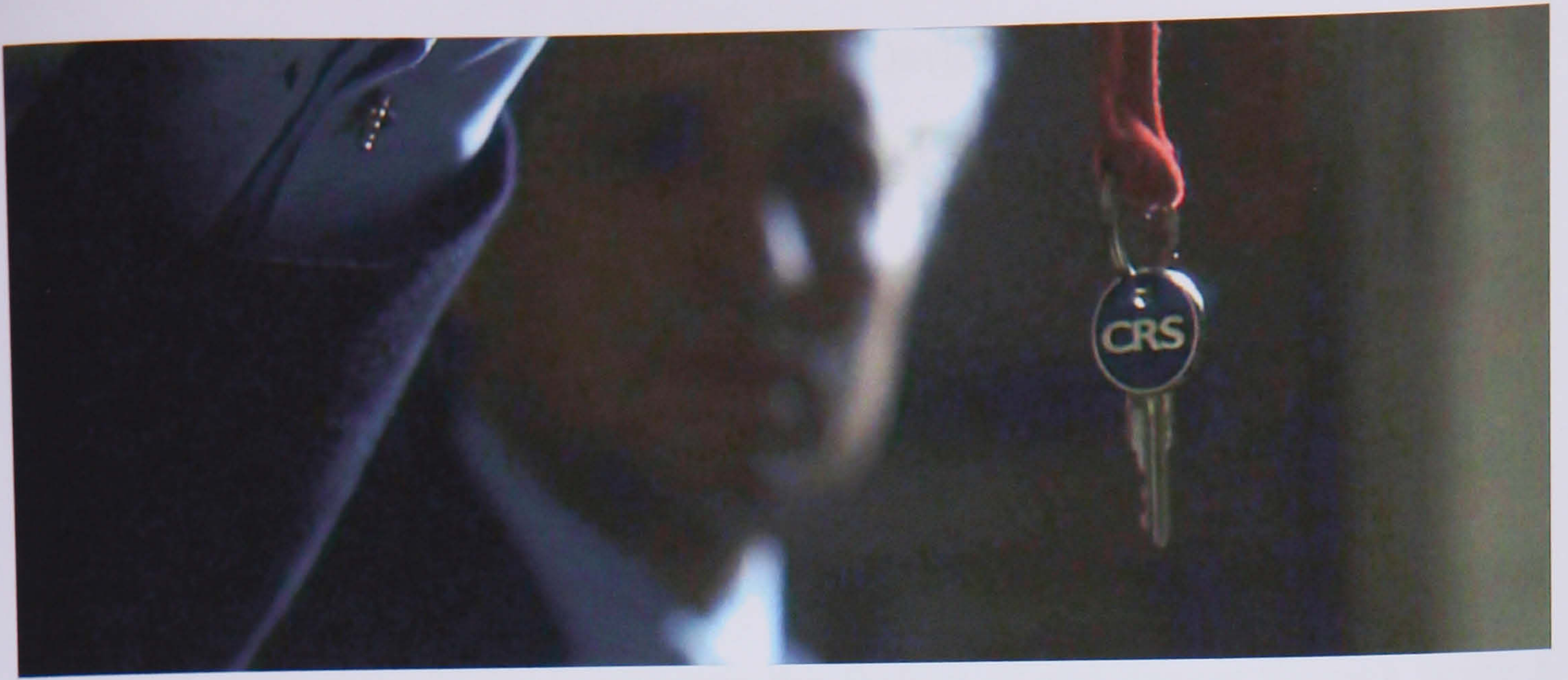


Figure 5.8 Scrutinizing and isolating the usable object in *The Game*



Figure 5.9 Emphasizing the usable object in *The Game*

that in video games ‘actions always have deterministic consequences for characters or events’ (2000, 54). The ‘game’ certainly is tailored to Nicholas, but a good video game feels largely the same via its responsiveness. Yet, in both video games and Nicholas’s ‘game’, this is an illusion of control. Nicholas is empowered to use the keys, but ultimately, he is being manipulated into doing what he does.

Let me make it perfectly clear, *The Game* deals thematically with what is at stake in a video game, namely the illusion of control in the structured environment of the ‘game’. I am not arguing that it is some hybridization of film and the interactive medium of computer games. It does not borrow from the digital aesthetics of games as *The Matrix* does, or reference them in the manner of *Series 7: The Contenders*. It

does not trade on the sensorial interactivity like David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*, and its narrative is not part of the crossover relationship seen in *Indiana Jones* films/*Indiana Jones* games¹⁹ and *Tomb Raider* games/*Tomb Raider* films, with their quest structures, collectable artefacts and stylized puzzles with people in peril.²⁰ Rather, *The Game* taps into the essential pleasures of video games: a space of emotionally and sensorially invested risk, yet cocooned by an element of security. The 'game' does up the ante though, for it enhances the feeling of real danger through being a fusion of video games, role-play and extreme sports. Nicholas has to complete physically demanding tasks; he does not merely invest his concerns in an electronic point of identification.

Furthermore, there are what appear to be physical risks undertaken by Nicholas: he does climb up a lift shaft, he has to jump from a fire escape, and he does have to extricate himself from a taxi sinking in the harbour. That he and the audience are told just before the denouement that 'There was always a safety net', such as rescue divers waiting when the car plunged into the water, confirms it was a game, but does not deny his fears whilst 'acting out' his role in the 'game'. I will come to whether Nicholas ultimately believes it is a game later, but at the beginning of the 'game', he surely does. And although he may have trusted that precautions would have been taken, he would still be engaging in a risky pursuit, for even extreme sports enthusiasts take safety measures. Thus, the activity Nicholas initially willingly agrees to play is founded on feelings of anxiety and danger, and physical punishment of the body (cuts, bruises, exhaustion). All of which are therefore deemed desirable in a game.

¹⁹ The *Indiana Jones* films are, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, USA, 1981), *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (Steven Spielberg, USA, 1984) and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (Steven Spielberg, USA, 1989), whilst the *Indiana Jones* games include *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1982) and *Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb* (2003).

²⁰ We might note though that it is perhaps not incidental that Michael Douglas also starred in *Romancing the Stone* (Robert Zemeckis, USA, 1984), a film inspired by *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

It is significant that *The Game* is not alone in touching on the logic. A close cinematic comparison is the watching/feeling/experiencing of playback clips in *Strange Days* (Kathryn Bigelow, USA, 1995), which are described by the black-marketeer Lenny (Ralph Fiennes) as, ‘This is life. It’s a piece of somebody’s life. It’s pure and uncut, straight from the cerebral cortex.’²¹ His customers undergo the same sensorial responses as the person in the clip. One genre of the clips is blackjack, where the person dies (intentionally or otherwise). A fellow dealer, Tick (Richard Edson), declares these are ‘what people wanna see’. Albeit that Lenny describes the death sensation as a zap that ‘brings down your whole day’, the suggested popularity indicates a desire for the fear, pain and sensorial overload: to feel death and not die, and feel pain but control it. Like Caillois’s child and his/her tooth, the players of blackjack clips want to toy with the pain sensation. It is therefore appropriate that a band in *Strange Days* sing the lyric ‘I’ll make you lick my injuries.’²² Unlike *The Game*, the controlled body is not the central theme of *Strange Days*. Further, it would be apposite to note that through both their name and function, the SQUIDS used to play the clips are perhaps closer to the game pods that plug into the spinal column in *eXistenZ* than the play environ of *The Game*.

The blurring of the game world/virtual world and reality does, of course, feature in all three films, and it is unsurprising that the ambiguous status of reality inclines itself towards a state of paranoia for the subject. In *Strange Days*, Philo (Michael Wincott) is said to have become ‘such a control freak’ after ‘doing way too much playback.’ In *eXistenZ*, real life might feel ‘safe’ and ‘boring’ for Allegra (Jennifer

²¹ The phrase ‘pure and uncut’, with the implication of drugs, is not without relevance. The altered states offered by drugs verge on the notion of the controlled body, after all, you choose (although addiction makes this a moot point) when to take them. But the nature of narcotics (as well as the issue of purity) leaves the experience of a high lacking the assured quality of a controlled space. We should also note that the terminology of drugs pervades extreme sports through the term ‘adrenalin junky’, whilst the pleasure of BDSM is frequently explained by the release of the human body’s own high-inducing drug, endorphin.

²² The lyric is from the song ‘Rid of Me’, which was originally recorded by PJ Harvey in 1993.

Jason Leigh), but it also ‘feels like a game’ to her companion, and prompts a player (and probably the cinematic audience too) to plead at the film’s closure, ‘Hey, tell me the truth, are we still in the game?’ Similarly, *The Game* prompts and magnifies suspicion. For as the ‘game’ progresses, Nicholas begins to doubt whether it is all a game, or whether it is an elaborate fraud designed to swindle him out of his money.

First unsure whether some events are really attempted blackmail, Nicholas is then told by Conrad that CRS is persecuting him, before Christine convinces Nicholas that CRS has cleared out his bank accounts. Amidst the doubts, a telephone in a public phone booth replays a conversation Nicholas has just had, and he later wakes up battered and cut in a grave in Mexico, stripped of all identity and forced to sell the precious watch that had belonged to his father.²³ That the whole ‘game’ might only be a smokescreen for an elaborate fraud has resonances with David Mamet’s *House of Games* (USA, 1987). Featuring similar acts of deception directed at both the protagonist and the audience, a psychologist, Margaret (Lindsay Crouse), follows a confidence trickster’s exploits (‘confidence games’ as he calls them), but in turn is conned by him. Fake deaths and false reality are explored as he steals her money, and there is even an acknowledgment of the masochistic impulse in Margaret’s relationship with him, for a note in her journal reads, ‘The necessity to find a place to be humiliated, a place to go back to again and again.’ Both films indicate how convenient it is to elide play into mind games and scams, especially when the unsettling masochistic pleasures of the games are to the fore.

In *The Game*, at stake is an issue of reality, not quite virtual reality, but an artificial reality nonetheless. Jonathan Romney locates *The Game* alongside *Dark City* (Alex Proyas, USA, 1998) and *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, USA, 1998) in a

²³ The themes of loss of identity and paranoia also pervade *The Net* (Irwin Winkler, USA, 1995), a film written by the writing partnership of John Brancato and Michael Ferris who also wrote *The Game*. The two films even share the feature of a character abandoned in Mexico.

category of new paranoia films where the defining characteristic is the addressing of 'the questionable surface of reality and the possibility that it might all turn out to be pure fabrication' (1998, 39). Immersion in another world is conducive to what Allegra calls in *eXistenZ* 'a very weird reality bleed-through effect'. The concept is well known to players of video games. Talmadge Wright has surveyed gamers and found that even when they had finished playing, participants in an all-night game of *Counter-Strike* (1999) 'would look around their environment scanning for combatants, at least for the first 15 minutes' (in Poole 2003, 52).²⁴ That the aftereffect of the challenging sensory overload of games is temporary is reassuring, but the paranoiac quality is quite apparent. *The Game* depicts the sensation quite astutely. The day after Nicholas starts his 'game', a slow-motion sequence shows him carefully scanning the occupants of the airport lounge for objects to use in the 'game', at one point picking up a child's toy clown thinking it is a CRS clue.

As the leakage is directional from the video games to the 'real', it ensures play can continue without being corrupted/interrupted by the real. In *The Game*, paranoia prevents 'reality' becoming pure play, for the events affecting Nicholas have a duality of meaning. That paranoia is key seems evident in the choice of Daniel Schorr as the newscaster who invades the space of the home games console (the television) and directly informs Nicholas of 'a few ground rules' for playing the 'game'. Schorr is a real-life journalist, well known for his exclusive reports on the Watergate hearing, and arranging to publish the suppressed findings on US intelligence agencies. Schorr is a man enveloped in paranoia.²⁵

The sense that someone or something is pulling the strings, is in control,

²⁴ Randy Schroeder (1996) has also examined these leakages via a combination of what he terms Huizinga's concept of playspace and Jean Baudrillard's theorizing of the simulacrum. Schroeder concludes that in hypothesizing about the hyperreal the parameters of play must not be forgotten as we increasingly experience immersive media as 'real' worlds and not playspace.

²⁵ He added the same tone to *The Net*.

pervades *The Game*, whether it is being done for financial gain or Nicholas's entertainment. Although apparently exorcizing his own ghosts in an updated version of *A Christmas Carol*, it is not Nicholas's protestation, 'I don't care about money' that reveals he is reaching his catharsis, it is his exclaimed desire of 'I wanna meet the Wizard.' His comment references *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, USA, 1939),²⁶ the archetypal dual realities movie, which, with its linear narrative encompassing a series of encounters and obstacles to overcome, makes it similar to the video game structure. Like Dorothy in Oz, Nicholas craves the identity of the controlling hand. In effect, by making his demand he admits he has no control. Crucially, the admission of his loss of control allows the 'game' to progress towards conclusion.

A fundamental issue remains though: Nicholas has partaken in the 'game', but has he played it? For Caillois and Huizinga, an essential property of play is choosing to do so and therefore gaining enjoyment, and for my contention that there is pleasure in temporarily abandoning control, he must therefore play. When, in his paranoid state, he shoots the 'Wizard', who turns out to be merely his brother orchestrating the play, Nicholas does not take pleasure in the 'game'. But by prompting him to replicate his father in a suicidal plunge from the roof of a building, the remorseful Nicholas removes the shackles of his ancestry. That Nicholas's jump was pre-planned/predestined by the 'game' (presumably guided by the responses given when registering), confirms the 'hard rails' structure of this part of the 'game', and ensures that breakaway glass and airbags are below to cushion his fall. Whilst his father worked too hard, Nicholas has now discovered the joy of play and its 'escape from responsibility and routine' (Caillois 1961, 6).

²⁶ Although there are other versions of the film, as well as L. Frank Baum's novel, I would suggest it is the more familiar film version that is being referenced.

No doubt, at the end, relief is Nicholas's central emotion: that Conrad is not dead (his wounds are only fake blood), and that it was a game. But he is also paired with his ex-partner Anson, who since agreeing to his severance package has 'never been happier'. The changed Nicholas is also much more approachable, thanking his brother, being friendly to his ex-wife and her new husband, and rectifying the fact that he had never asked Christine her name. Retrospectively at least, Nicholas enjoyed the 'game'. But did he also enjoy the loss of control, the escape from responsibility?

Feingold told Nicholas at the CRS interview he could drop out anytime (a prerequisite for it to be legal, but also to be play). Is this so? After he nearly drowns in the taxi, and Conrad accuses him of conspiring with CRS against him, Nicholas does appear to wish to stop events, and contacts the police to investigate the now vanished company. However, there is no concerted effort to track it down, and rather than using a private detective agency, Nicholas continues the hunt for Christine alone. Furthermore, he does not call the emergency contact telephone number for CRS that he was given by the newscaster. The implication is that Nicholas is enjoying attempting to solve it on his own. Other pointers also suggest he likes the danger, as well as events being slightly out of his control. The morning after fleeing the hospital with Christine, Nicholas is awoken by a telephone call from his worried secretary: he has not arrived for a meeting and it is eleven o'clock. Indicative of his gradual slide from regimentation, the duration of his sleep implies a contentedness not witnessed in his life until then.

Furthermore, Nicholas appears intrigued by the 'game' and its challenge to his control. Just before Conrad arrives to tell him that CRS are persecuting him, Nicholas discovers his house has been broken into. The walls have been vandalized with graffiti, and a crime scene photograph of his dead father has been left in a room

with a note: 'Like my father before me, I choose eternal sleep.' When the brothers subsequently argue, Conrad charges Nicholas with trying to 'control this conversation', being a 'control freak', and notably, 'Nobody asked you to play dad.' The use of the word 'play' is not a fortuitous accident arising from the limitations of vocabulary; rather it is what Nicholas feels compelled to do ('Did I have a choice?').

The dilute psychology ordered around the notion of being condemned to repeat the sins of the father is of little interest to me. The point is that the controlled environment of the 'game' is the ideal space to practice losing control. The 'game' is extreme sport as role-play. In life, Nicholas felt he had no choice but to be his father, and he continued the role in the 'game'. But where the father's apparently over-developed search for control led to what appears to be suicide, the rules of the 'game' make it more forgiving for Nicholas. This is because he is actually denied control throughout, under the illusion of being in control. Thus, he is deprived of even the ultimate choice of death; he plunges to his doom, but lives. Like a video game, he can press reset and start his life again. And as per countless video games, the play is the end in itself; it cannot be won only completed. But *The Game* takes the concept one stage further: only by losing can you end the 'game'.

Although not founded on the repetition of 'dying over and over again' of electronic deaths (Green, Reid and Bigum 1998, 19), there does appear to be a comparable impulse. The 'game' is probably not repeatable in the manner of a video game, although an earlier draft of the script did end on the image of graffiti stating 'Level Two' besides an upward-pointing arrow, therefore suggesting the next stage of the 'game' (Swallow 2003, 109). However, the 'game' does make a different relationship to life and death quite apparent. Indeed, Steven Poole's analysis of how 'videogames redefine a "life" as an expendable, iterable part of a larger campaign' is applicable (2000, 68). Conrad is killed, and Nicholas kills himself, yet both live to

tell the tale. For Poole, the reset button means ‘instant expiation for the sin of failure’ (2000, 68); Nicholas’s sins of obsessively taking control and excluding others are absolved, but there is another factor to his ‘game’: death, albeit a false one, is an aim. In video games, you/your character cannot die, only be reborn; the same fate awaits Nicholas. Therefore, just like the end of *Crash*, where Catherine and James have failed in their attempted suicide car wreck, you can think ‘maybe the next one’, but in the meantime, you can thrive on the closeness to death. David Le Breton has described how in extreme sports, ‘A deal is made symbolically with Death, with the body as the currency’ (2000, 6). The participant takes voluptuous pleasure in what others would fear, and although death is never the aim, it can always arise, with the pursuits tending ever closer. It has become a cliché, but the ethos is that to live life fully, you must live in fear of death. Le Breton puts it more prosaically when he states that ‘playing on the razor’s edge is an elegant way of putting one’s life on a par with Death for an instant in order to steal some of its power’ (2000, 7). It is a heightened form of tipping a chair back on the two rear legs, and feeling the thrill of oscillating on the cusp of safety and disaster. If you were not frightened that you might actually fall backwards, there would be no fun. Extreme sports like BASE jumping or the ‘game’ take the fear and raid the pain barriers too, but the former is more explicit about its pleasures of enjoying pushing the body’s limits.

In spite of all the emphasis on enduring and suffering, the underlying masochistic impulse remains implicit rather than explicit in *The Game*. Nicholas is not told at the outset that he will nearly drown, be shot at, jump from buildings and be abandoned in Mexico, so he cannot declare, in extreme sport style, ‘bring it on’. Nor is the fact that it is a game, that is, for pleasure, apparent throughout, because the threat that it may be a financial fraud legitimates Nicholas’s persistence (although, as I have mentioned, there is the element of him being intrigued and not taking the

easier option of employing a private detective). Yet, there are hints of a pleasure in pain that ties the whole enterprise into the delights of BDSM.

When Nicholas believes a staged hotel bedroom containing drugs and incriminating photographs is a blackmail plot by Anson, he makes a most incredible statement. Attempting to dismiss their importance, he throws the Polaroids onto a table and shouts, ‘You can have pictures of me wearing nipple-rings, butt-fucking Captain Kangaroo [for all I care]’.²⁷ Besides the homosexual reference, the piercing accoutrements hint at a BDSM scene. As an isolated incident, the phrasing would not be so strange, but earlier in the film, when asked by his ex-wife whether he had had a good birthday, Nicholas replied, ‘I went not once, but twice through the spanking machine.’ In addition, during the image response test, a series of words were flashed up in-between the pictures; the sequence ran: Masculinity, Submission, Orgasm, Death, Fornication, and after cutting away to another shot, Commitment. We could also note that the sexual tone of the ‘game’ is also established by Conrad’s choice of pseudonym when he gives Nicholas his CRS invitation: Seymour Butts.²⁸ The BDSM quotient, while never made overt, serves as an undercurrent to support the treatise of relinquishing control.

By choosing the video game-like structure, the topic of control would, inherently, be prominent, and Fincher exploits this by deploying a protagonist with problems relinquishing control. But the pleasure Nicholas gains from the pursuit is mostly delayed or disguised. Extreme sports, as Le Breton’s work shows, are orientated around the pleasures of their extreme sensations (pain, enduring, suffering), not about overcoming, completing or catharsis. Even video games have

²⁷ The sense of ‘deviancy’ is heightened when you know that Captain Kangaroo was the host of a children’s television show that ran on CBS from 1955 to 1984.

²⁸ The name Seymour Butts is particularly associated with the pornography filmmaker Adam Glasser who uses it as his pseudonym, and he has even produced a pornographic video game that features his persona as the character you play (Tang 1999, 178).

tangible yet imaginary dangers that quicken the pulse and stretch the nerves. That the puzzle narrative structure of adventure video games puts greater emphasis on a task to be completed rather than a painful pursuit to be enjoyed (like an extreme sport), means that they tend towards disguising and diminishing, but not destroying, the clarity of their masochistic status. By having the subplot of Nicholas's adventure potentially being a scam, the controlled body of the video game partially loses contact with its touchstone of enjoying painful yet pleasurable pursuits, and so the motivation is disavowed. That the stimulus remains, and once again flavours a narrative, says much about the controlled body's appeal to Hollywood. Furthermore, although disowned, the film displays a more pronounced curiosity for the sensorial limits of the human body than most, and suggests that David Fincher was in tune with the cultural trend for fusing pain and pleasure. His next film confirmed this. In effect, *The Game* acted as a trial run for a more explicit tackling of masochistic pleasures in pain. David Fincher pressed the reset button and directed *Fight Club*.

A Pleasure That Can't Be Beaten

Fight Club is a film that generates extreme responses and adamant interpretations. Henry A. Giroux has castigated what he perceives as the film's reduction of the crisis of capitalism to a crisis of masculinity whereby it is 'a morally bankrupt and politically reactionary film' (2002, 274). Further, he states it depicts 'deeply conventional views of violence, gender relations, and masculinity' (2002, 261).²⁹ Conversely, both Susan Faludi (in Giroux 2002, 277) and Alexandra Juhasz (2002, 210) describe *Fight Club* as a feminist film. Apparently in partial agreement with the

²⁹ Giroux rightly notes that like 'any other cultural text, [*Fight Club*] can be read differently by different audiences' (2002, 282), but finds it works 'pedagogically to legitimate some meanings, invite particular desires, and exclude others' (2002, 282). For Giroux, there is no doubt that *Fight Club* needs to have its 'ideological contradictions and political absences' addressed by works like his (2002, 283).

latter two comments, Christopher Sharrett (2002, 321) reads the film as ‘a satiric response to works like Mel Gibson’s *Braveheart* ([USA,] 1995), films that yearn for the restoration of male authority by reference to legendary triumphs of primeval patriarchal heroes’. Differences also arise surrounding the relevance of its cultural context. Ed Norton, who plays Jack, found that it ‘struck a generational chord with me’ (in Fuller 1999, 12); Charlotte Hooper describes *Fight Club* as a ‘parody of some core obsessions of US culture: consumerism, therapy and violence’ (2002, 131); and Jeanne Wolff Bernstein sees it as ‘a modern rendition of the ancient motif of the *doppelgänger*’ (2002, 1192). Consequently, all three situate the film as a specific product of its time. In contrast, some critics have witnessed an addressing of timeless and universal concerns. Christopher Deacy compares it with *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, USA, 1999) to locate ‘potent religious parables’ pertinent to the nature of human existence (2002, 62), and Terrell Carver discusses *Fight Club* as ‘an allegory, with Everyman at the centre’ (2002, 129). The resulting conclusions are equally mixed: where Deacy sees a textual grappling with the ‘efficacy of confrontation as a means of attaining redemption’ (2002, 61), with the verdict that there is such a potential, Charlotte Hooper believes the film shows ‘that fighting offers no real redemption’ (2002, 131).

My intention is therefore not to add yet another layer of meaning to the film, although this cannot be totally avoided, rather what I have to say does not need to define our understanding of *Fight Club*, but instead illuminate what the other readings acknowledge but avoid seeking an interpretation of. I aim to make manifest what is left unspoken. Nearly every review notes the film’s display of masochism, and most discern the sexual frisson of it, yet its function as the underlying structural premise is ignored. My task is to uncloak what has remained hidden, namely the characters’ need for pain, their search for control, and their desire to temporarily lose

control (but in a controlled space).

The tentative depiction of extreme play found in *The Game* becomes a veritable explosion of masochistic painful pleasure in *Fight Club*, and thus aestheticized suffering is fundamental to the film. Beginning with the biggest sexual organ, the brain (a cliché, but vital to all notions of sexual role-play, most especially BDSM), and ending with a penis, *Fight Club* charts a course through the desire for sensual pain. Denied his suffering of sleeplessness by a doctor who tells him he should see the members of the testicular cancer support group to know what real pain is, Jack finds comfort in attending meetings for diseases and disorders he does not have. The therapy sessions immediately cure his insomnia: 'I found freedom. Losing all hope was freedom.' Just like Nicholas oversleeping in *The Game* after beginning to lose some control, Jack finds his crying in the company of suffering allows him to 'let go' and find rest: 'Babies don't sleep this well.'

Although he lacks their physical pain, the afflictions of the legitimate attendees are crucial to both him and the film. In another support group, all those present have to imagine their pain as a white ball of healing light; a psychological reversal, the exercise is designed to draw strength from their pain. The film thus mediates on a discourse of pain: how it is conceptualized and how it is dealt with, or more accurately, how it is denied. For Jack, the embracing of pain creates a quintessential video game experience: 'Every evening I died. And every evening I was born again.' Whereas the support group members 'give each other strength' through enduring their respective suffering, Jack finds liberation in their pain.

His succour evaporates and his sleeplessness returns when he notices Marla (Helena Bonham Carter), another 'tourist', attending the meetings. It is now that he encounters Tyler Durden, a charismatic soap seller, who spouts a Nietzschean-influenced brand of homespun philosophy. Immediately after their encounter, Jack's

trendy apartment is mysteriously blown up, and he turns to Tyler for somewhere to stay. Rejecting the numbness of a corporate job as a motor vehicle recall coordinator, and an existence defined by lifestyle choices ('I had become a slave to the IKEA nesting instinct'), Jack once more finds sanctuary in slumber. However, the traditional support groups of the US therapy culture are gone, and in their place is the secretive Fight Club founded by him and Tyler Durden. Here men can experience the heightened pleasures of physical violence, and the catharsis of physical pain.

Only retrospectively do we discover the major deceit of the narrative: Tyler Durden is Jack's alter ego. As the same person, he has both physically and mentally been wrestling with himself. Later in this chapter, I will attend to the matter of alternative realities (a feature we also noted of *The Game*), as well as analyse some key scenes displaying the film's engagement with the desire for pain within the sporting environment. First, I wish to establish how the notion of control infuses the text, and intersects with the themes of the film.

Near the beginning, Jack embarks on narrating the events that have led up to that moment. Looking towards the camera, he says in a voiceover, 'No wait. Back up. Let me start earlier', before proceeding to tell of events six months earlier. Later in the film, the image freezes on Tyler, and Jack announces, 'Let me tell you a little bit about Tyler Durden.' In the next shot, Jack breaks the fourth wall and addresses the audience. Because of these events, and others that serve to also deconstruct cinema, Jack is defined as a controlling force over the narrative. In other words, control is even within the agenda of the film's formal properties. However, Jack's authority over the narrative is contradicted by a narrative that suggests all white, heterosexual males, including Jack, are denied their legitimate powerful status.

The central premise, and one frequently voiced by Tyler, is that in the current consumerist society, men have lost their traditional roles ('The things you own end

up owning you`), have been feminized (‘Like, why do guys like you and I know what a duvet is? Is this essential to our survival in a hunter-gatherer sense of the word?’), and are under threat from the dangerous opposite sex (‘I’m wondering if another woman is really the answer we need’). Jack is even denied the soporific effect of the testicular cancer support group (Remaining Men Together), because Marla has also joined this male sanctuary. The situation therefore appears to confirm Tyler’s view of the emasculating effect of women: Marla is the embodiment of the fear of the castrating woman. That Jack and Tyler seek an all-male space founded on pain and fighting, and which is outside a culture they regard as defined by femininity, also supports the negative depiction of women.³⁰ But Giroux misleads when he characterizes the film as follows:

its intensely misogynist representation of women, and its intimation that violence is the only means through which men can be cleansed of the dire affect women have on the shaping of their identities. (2002, 275)

Furthermore, it is wrong to see *Fight Club* and/or the Fight Clubs in the film, as ‘a defense of a highly stereotypical and limited sense of masculinity’ (2002, 271), for as Smith and Lisle note, ‘the film attacks *both* hegemonic Rambo-fed muscle pumping masculinity *and* the complacency of “new-man” feminist-friendly, IKEA-draped manhood’ (2002, 134). What the film and the clubs offer is a space to explore masculinity not negate femininity. My reading is supported by David Whitson’s findings in respect of sports: ‘What is really threatened by the entry of women into male preserves is opportunities for men to rehearse their ties as men and reaffirm their differences from women’ (1990, 26). Whilst in practice this frequently means the bawdy locker-room banter that demeans and objectifies women (and non-heterosexual men), and bolsters male power, it is not the case in *Fight Club*. Women

³⁰ The situation replicates the suggestion by Kevin Sheard and Eric Dunning that the development of rugby football as a male preserve was a response to the rise of the suffragette movement (in Kidd 1990, 36).

do not feature in the limited conversations of the clubs, and rather than reinforcing traditional masculinity, what it means to be male, in terms of physique, violence and control, is redefined.

Fundamentally, Giroux neglects the importance of play. Fight Club is, as with all play, 'not "ordinary" or "real" life' (Huizinga 1970, 26), yet Giroux charges it with failing in its critique of capitalism, for 'the outside world remains the same' (2002, 271). However, it is its separation that enables the club to function as a space to negotiate masculinities, and as I will demonstrate, one of these involves a quite radically different construction of manhood. Like BDSM role-play, and the artificial realities on offer via video games and on-line communities, the play space allows people to try on new personalities; Jack describes it thus: 'Who you were in Fight Club was not who you were in the rest of the world.'

We should not confuse separation with isolation though. We saw with *The Game* the bleed-through from play to reality. The images and actions in Fight Club do disturb boundaries and have the potential to shape the world beyond. Within the diegesis, their impact on the wider society is not discernable, for it is not explored; hence, most commentators have focused on the patriarchal values espoused by Tyler, and interpreted the fighting as a perpetuation of male authority, which is asserted through violence and physicality, and hidden behind the façade of the white man as victim. Thus, male masochistic enjoyment is disavowed, with critics such as Nicola Rehling (2001) reading the pleasure in pain as merely a disguise to consolidate male power. However, for the cinematic audience, we are fully exposed to the unsettling image of men enjoying being beaten where the suffering is not treated as a sign of virility or victimhood, but as a means of abandoning control and finding release. Not necessarily challenging patriarchy or capitalism, the play environment of the Fight Clubs enables a rethinking of the coding of masculinity.

But in *Fight Club*, play also becomes corrupted. Huizinga wrote that: ‘Commercial competition does not, of course, belong to the immemorial sacred play-forms’ (1970, 226). The militaristic members of Project Mayhem may destroy the yuppie coffee bar, but the Fight Clubs that have sprung up all over the US are only another form of franchise. Garry Whannel, in his study of sport, has described how ‘maverick masculine individualism ... increasingly conflicts with the new corporate paternalism’ (1999, 262), and it is evident in the resistance of many extreme sports enthusiasts to corporate involvement. Both *The Game* and *Fight Club* address the issue via the numbing drone-like existence of capitalistic big business. That play is falsified by business is especially evident in the latter. It is only after Jack has been suspended on full pay, and he has what he terms ‘corporate sponsorship’ for Fight Club, that Tyler changes the nature of their activities. In the next scene, a Fight Club session ends, and Tyler issues ‘homework assignments’ (including smashing cars and demagnetizing rental videotapes) in an assault on what he believes to be harming masculinity. The activities spiral outwards to the bombing of all major credit card institutions, and only then does Jack realize that Tyler has gone too far. In other words, Tyler takes on the controlling, paternalistic attitude of a corporate leader.³¹ The point then is this, Fight Club had to stand outside society, and be bordered by its own regulations to secure a controlled environment for play and the challenge to masculinity. The film makes the distinction of the space quite apparent.

The US theatrical teaser and trailer made much of what effectively became a mantra for the film: ‘The first rule of Fight Club is: You do not talk about Fight Club.’ That the command should feature so prominently in promotion affirms the centrality of rules to the narrative. After an initial fight between Tyler and Jack, more

³¹ In a scene filmed, but cut from the final release, Jack returns home to explain his financial package, but Tyler walks away merely saying, ‘We’ve gotta take Fight Club up a notch.’

and more men gradually join them in bouts in the car lot until they all move into the basement of a bar. In voiceover, Jack announces that the concept had been ‘on the tip of everyone’s tongue. Tyler and I just gave it a name’. In such a tone of inauguration, Tyler welcomes all the men to Fight Club, and proclaims the eight rules. In the darkened basement, men remove belts, shoes and wedding rings as Tyler issues the following decree:

The first rule of Fight Club is: You do not talk about Fight Club.

The second rule of Fight Club is: You do not talk about Fight Club.

Third rule of Fight Club: Someone yells stop, goes limp, taps out; the fight is over.

Fourth rule: Only two guys to a fight.

Fifth rule: One fight at a time, fellas.

Sixth rule: No shirts; no shoes.

Seventh rule: Fights will go on as long as they have to.

And the eighth and final rule: If this is your first night at Fight Club, you have to fight.

I list the rules in full to show how much screen time is given over to them. They serve to show Tyler as the charismatic leader (even though Jack’s voiceover states they were ‘the rules that he and I decided’), and to offer the fight space as a controlled environment: it is a separate space, falling outside the rules that govern the rest of society. Jack later draws attention to its separateness, stating, ‘Fight Club only exists in the hours between when Fight Club starts and when Fight Club ends.’ When meeting a fellow member outside these times, he recognizes the shared bruises and cuts with a knowing look, but that is all (figure 5.10). Like Bob Flanagan’s BDSM marks and the scars of the protagonists in *Crash*, these serve as memories, and as with the victims of the artistic serial killer, they are marks of past control exercised over the body. The rules demarcate a controlled space of play, but control is also vital to the painful pleasures contained within.



Figure 5.10 Knowing look of shared pain in *Fight Club*

Corresponding to Caillois's description of play, the Fight Club rules are 'precise, arbitrary, unexceptional rules' (1961, 7). Although arbitrary, they are purposeful, and define a specifically erotic quality to the play. Robert Alan Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus (2002) have provided an excellent insight into the extra features contained on the double DVD release of the film, such as audio commentaries and bonus material.³² They see the spectator of such material as an 'invested viewer' (having an incentive to have their viewing experience directed to ensure value for money), and the DVD package as a whole promoting a preferred reading via the auteuristic commentaries. They conclude that this "extra text" dissuades the viewer from acknowledging the film's homoerotic elements as representing homosexual experience' (2002, 21). I note their comments because their work overlaps much of my study. However, although eager to pursue the homosexual under/overtone, they are reluctant to engage with the even more transparent aspect of BDSM sexual interactions.

Brookey and Westerfelhaus rightly recognize how the sporting contest allows the camera to linger over sweaty, taut male bodies in close physical contact with each

³² Brookey and Westerfelhaus base their study on the US release of the DVD, which contains extra commentaries in comparison with the UK release.

other. They note too that, in the words of Michael Bronski, though ‘blatant homosexuality does not have mass appeal ... the exotic implications of hidden homosexuality have huge sales potential’ (in Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2002, 28). As I have noted throughout my study, the same is true but even more so of the marking and controlling of the body. From their findings, they deduce, ‘homoeroticism in a homosocial context can be evoked and then beaten back, quite literally in the case of *Fight Club*, before it slides into homosexuality’ (2002, 29). For Brookey and Westerfelhaus (2002, 35), the first two rules do not refer to the secrecy of the sport, but ‘a relationship that dares not speak its name’: homosexuality. However, if they had moved on to examine the next rule, namely ‘Someone yells stop, goes limp, taps out; the fight is over’, they would have discovered that BDSM is the sexual activity inscribed into the play. Consent is on the agenda (as in all play), but like the safe words of a BDSM scene, contestants can tap out at anytime. It is not that the homosexuality is beaten back, rather the BDSM is beaten into the open. It is true that the rules of no shirt and the pairing of men evoke sex, but pain defines the form of intimacy. And like BDSM scenes, voyeurism can be important (‘One fight at a time’), but curiosity seekers are not welcome (‘If this is your first night ... you have to fight). The rules therefore set up a scenario within a BDSM context, and the filming and voiceover reassert that it is not a sporting contest.

After the rules are proclaimed, two men fight. Shirtless, they drip with sweat and blood, and Jack looks on with a keen eye. As Brookey and Westerfelhaus state, ‘The fight concludes with the loser lying on the floor in a passive sexual position, a look of ecstasy on his face’ (2002, 35) (figure 5.11). However, they make no mention of the fact that he is the one that has called a halt to the grappling, his face is battered and bloody, and the elation derives not from sex, but the punishment. It is the aesthetic of suffering that is displayed.



Figure 5.11 Ecstasy of suffering in *Fight Club*

Jack narrates, 'You weren't alive anywhere like you were there'; his words match Le Breton's recording of the comments of extreme sports enthusiasts. The comparison is not surprising, for both activities use pain as a means of confirming being alive, and flirt with the danger of being out of control. In addition, in response to Jack's question of whether the man in the Gucci underwear advertisement is what a man looks like, Tyler replies: 'Self-improvement is masturbation. Now self-destruction ...' Although unfinished, the implication that masochistic pleasure is central to Tyler's schema is evident. (In the novel, the sentence is 'Maybe self-destruction is the answer' (Palahniuk 1997, 49).) Further, the scene cuts to the Fight Club where an enraptured Jack watches a strutting Tyler after he has forced his opponent to give in. In turn, Jack then has his face pounded into the floor before submitting to his opponent. In voiceover, he attests, 'Fight Club wasn't about winning or losing. It wasn't about words. The hysterical shouting was in tongues, like at a Pentecostal church.... Afterwards, we all felt saved.' So just like extreme sports, which have been described as 'not so much about winning, as putting on a great show' (voiceover narrator in the television programme *Xtremists*, part1, 2003), Fight Club is not about victory. You prove yourself (to yourself) by enduring. The pleasure of Fight Club is therefore not violence as such but suffering, a point

reinforced by the reference to Pentecostal Christianity. Christopher Deacy indicates the novel's greater stressing of religious imagery, which includes the comment 'Jesus did it with his crucifixion thing' (Palahniuk 1997, 70), but the masochism of Christ is still drawn on to suggest a redemptive quality in suffering.³³

Rather than confirming traditional machismo and male power, *Fight Club* articulates a fluidity of dominance and submission. It does so by tapping into the pleasures apparent in extreme sports and BDSM. I therefore find it surprising that Giroux could describe the film as having 'deeply conventional views of violence, gender relations, and masculinity' (2002, 261). Giroux's emphasis on the violence ignores its function. His focus on sadism blinds him to the masochistic impulse that is equally prevalent (if not more so). By founding his criticism on whether it is morally correct to romanticize violence when so many people are subjected to it on the grounds of sex, colour, gender and class, he ignores the fact that the Fight Clubs are about willing participation not coercion.

It is crucial that we recognize the exhilaration and exquisite pain the narrative posits to be available in Fight Club. Giroux calls the film 'a clarion call for the legitimization of dehumanizing forms of violence as a source of pleasure and sociality' (2002, 271), and therefore castigates all BDSMers as subhuman. That the interactions in Fight Club are based not just on respect, but also love, can be noted from Jack's reflection on events at the beginning of the film. He recounts, 'That old saying, how you always hurt the one you love; well, it works both ways.' The founding principle of his relationship with Tyler is condensed into the one sentence: a mutual desire premised on suffering.

The urge appears to originate in an attempt to escape the safety of society. Jack's

³³ Besides this scene, we can also consider the resurrection context of Jack commenting, 'Every evening, I died. And every evening, I was born again.'

job as a recall coordinator is about balancing the cost of withdrawing potentially faulty automobiles, and paying compensation for the few that do go wrong. The measuring of cost is also the measuring of risk. The horrified airline passenger listening to Jack's explanation of his role asks if there are many such accidents; he replies, 'You wouldn't believe.' Being oblivious to the situation had denied her that risk. Similarly, Tyler deconstructs the in-flight safety card with its depiction of passive passengers calmly braced for impact. They are both part of what he calls 'The illusion of safety.' Unlike the illusion of danger in video games, modern life surrounds us with safety and the illusion of safety. Like an adrenalin junky, who enjoys enduring extreme sports, Jack and Tyler wish to experience the loss of control, the fear that it is unsafe. But for them it has a supplementary quality that unites it with BDSM.

When Jack meets Tyler in a bar after his apartment has blown up, he talks for hours but cannot bring himself to ask if he can stay at Tyler's home. In a flirtatious manner, Tyler teases him: 'Three pitchers of beer and you still can't ask.' His comments then become more sexually defined: 'Cut the foreplay and just ask man.'³⁴ Tyler agrees to Jack staying, but he wants a favour in return: Jack to hit him as hard as he can. Jack is initially reticent, but Tyler argues, 'How much do you know about yourself if you've never been in a fight? I don't wanna die without any scars.' Thus, we return to the now familiar theme of marking the body: scars as memory and testament of life. It is the sign of suffering endured and overcome.

Finally, Jack awkwardly punches Tyler in the ear: not the spectacular Hollywood smack, but a meaty thump that enounces the flesh of the body. Repentant and

³⁴ The sexual tone had already been established in the scene by Tyler discussing a woman severing a man's penis, but the flirtation had actually begun much earlier. When Jack telephones Tyler, Tyler does not answer the call, but calls back and announces, 'I star 69'ed you.' The phrase refers to the call back code equivalent to 1471 used in the United Kingdom, but the comment has a pointed link to oral sex. None of these references appear in the novel.

believing he has ‘fucked it up’, Jack is told, ‘No, that was perfect’, and Tyler slams a punch into Jack’s stomach. Tyler checks that Jack is okay. He is, but says, ‘That really hurts.’ Tyler agrees, but both have begun to feel euphoric. Jack eagerly demands, ‘Hit me again.’ Not wishing to miss out, Tyler replies, ‘No, you hit me.’ What is therefore quite apparent is that the violence is founded on masochism not sadism: not the desire to hit, but be hit. They begin fighting again, and afterwards, as if in post-coital mode, lie back, a cigarette in Tyler’s hand, and Jack says, ‘We should do this again sometime’ (figure 5.12). The desire for blows is not the bravado of Jake La Motta in *Raging Bull*; Jack and Tyler have sourced a pleasure in pain: perhaps an endorphin high, as BDSM masochists have found, or the euphoric state of enduring hardship and torment that extreme sports players attest to. Or maybe it is a purely fictitious state; but the film is unequivocal that their pleasure is present.

That such a sensation is grounded in the real and is evidently felt as joyous makes it peculiar that Giroux should describe it as ‘pain parading as pleasure’ (2002, 273). A preceding comment by Giroux illuminates his position. He describes the actions as ‘senseless brutality’ (Giroux 2002, 272), thus exposing his lack of receptiveness to masochistic pleasure. He is not alone though. In Fincher’s DVD commentary to the scene, although he admits to ‘undercurrents of sadomasochism’, he claims that in Jack and Tyler’s case it comes from an ‘innocent place’ (in Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2002, 34). Brookey and Westerfelhaus interpret the comment as part of the overarching denial of homosexuality in the commentary (the innocence denies it is sexual), which legitimates the enjoyment of homoeroticism for the imagined target audience of the male heterosexual viewer. A similar reading of denial is obviously applicable to an interpretation that focuses on BDSM rather than homosexuality. As we saw in Chapter 2, the direct addressing of BDSM is usually avoided in films, with Hollywood preferring instead to use it as titillation, but mask it



Figure 5.12 Post-fight/coital relaxation in *Fight Club*

via sadism. That *Fight Club* makes it transparent that male masochism is central is only partially disavowed by the sporting contest. The film therefore treads new ground, but filmmakers are wary of alienating an audience by being too explicit. Perhaps this explains Fincher's comment of 'I think it's beyond sexuality' (in Taubin 1999b), and stating that 'The way the narrator [Jack] looks up to Tyler and wants to please him and get all of his attention doesn't seem to me to have anything to do with sex' (in Taubin 1999b).

Although commenting in relation to the charge of homoeroticism, the point equally applies to BDSM. I therefore believe Fincher (and the film too) is trying to draw on the concepts of control/out of control in extreme sports as much as on sexuality. Indeed, a further statement indicates that he is unaware of some key distinctions.

Do I care if people who are consenting adults have this Fight Club? I have no problem with that. I'm no sadomasochist, but it seems more responsible than bottling up all this rage about how unfulfilling their lives are. (In Taubin 1999b)

Both *Fight Club* and BDSM are heavily invested in dominance and submission, feeling out of control and being controlled, but they are not the same. Further, BDSM is certainly not about bottling up rage but sharing pleasure. That Fincher collapses

BDSM into anger, as well as homoeroticism, suggests a man aware of social trends but not in tune with their significance. It is perhaps telling that he distanced himself from the comparisons of *Crash* and *Fight Club*, by saying, 'I understand Edward Norton's character so well that I think what he's thinking is what everybody's thinking. It's not like wanting to fuck somebody's leg brace' (in Taubin 1999b). Whilst Fincher addresses a general perception of BDSM and extreme sports, Cronenberg distorts the reality of BDSM and body modification, but addresses their essence. That both were controversial films shows they both challenge by going beyond the middle ground of mainstream cinema in their depiction of the controlled body, but their approaches are quite dissimilar.

Fincher's uncertainty in respect of the topic is evident in the scene when the Mafioso bar owner, Lou (Peter Iacangelo), discovers Tyler running the Fight Club from his basement. Languidly posed, Tyler rejects Lou's demands that they leave and suggests he join them. A short jab to Tyler's stomach leaves him kneeling on the floor. Instead of fighting back, Tyler merely rebuffs Lou's interrogations of whether he understands he has to leave with comments like 'Still not getting it', which instantly prompt more punishment.

At first Lou is bemused but unperturbed by his confrontation with male masochism. Tyler beckons Lou on to punch him some more with the phrase, 'That's right Lou. Get it out.' The aggressor is unsettled but continues his vicious beating until Tyler begins to laugh manically and cries, 'Oh, yeah!' after a heavy blow. The passivity deflates Lou's aggression. Tyler proves his masculinity by enduring the beating not by successfully fighting back. The scene begins to imply that passivity can be a weapon. But the stance is largely undermined. Tyler pounces and begins to spit blood from his deeply savaged mouth onto Lou's face. In a crazed outburst, he cries, 'You don't know where I've been, Lou.' The implication, in the confines of the

dark, sweaty, all-male Fight Club, is that Tyler might have AIDS. Tyler persists in tormenting until Lou agrees they may continue to use the basement for Fight Club. What started as an insightful premise ends in potentially homophobic, but certainly unchallenging, male aggression. Although in this scene the film puts greater emphasis on giving up control than the novel does,³⁵ Fincher still appears to lack a conviction for masochism's potential to disarm.

Confusingly, the explicit masochism is instantly returned to. Helped up like a Christ figure, his disciples all around him (figure 5.13), Tyler sets the homework assignment of picking a fight with a stranger, *and losing*. The montage showing the attempted fights is the most whimsical sequence of the whole film, and therefore again weakens the potential exploration of masochistic pursuits. What is clear is that *Fight Club* is not fully committed to a masochism of fighting.³⁶ It does, however, achieve a greater clarity when it speaks of culturally recognizable masochistic pursuits.

It is logical that *Crash* should have been contrasted with *Fight Club*; Jack's job as a recall coordinator necessitates his attending and photographing crashed cars, just as Vaughan had done in the former film. Taking on the properties of the staged car smashes of *Crash*, a wreck in *Fight Club* is deemed 'Very modern art'. The film also features a car crash staged by Tyler for Jack to experience the relinquishing of control. Leaving Fight Club, Tyler and Jack drive off with two other members of Project Mayhem. Tyler steers the car towards oncoming traffic, and challenges the

³⁵ Lou's character does not exist in the novel, but the scene reworks a similar confrontation between Tyler and the projectionist union president. Threatened with redundancy, Tyler blackmails the president over pornographic images Tyler has spliced into the films he has shown to unsuspecting audiences. The president punches and kicks Tyler, who does not fight back, but just laughs. But his passivity is because he has already won: 'Crack my ribs, but if you miss one week's pay, I go public.... I am still your responsibility' (Palahniuk 1997, 115).

³⁶ Again though, Fincher should be acknowledged for going further than the novel in exploring the personal positives of masochism. When, in the novel, the men are assigned to pick a fight with a stranger and lose, the purpose is to make the winner feel better: 'The idea is to take some Joe on the street who's never been in a fight and recruit him. Let him experience winning for the first time in his life' (Palahniuk 1997, 119-120).

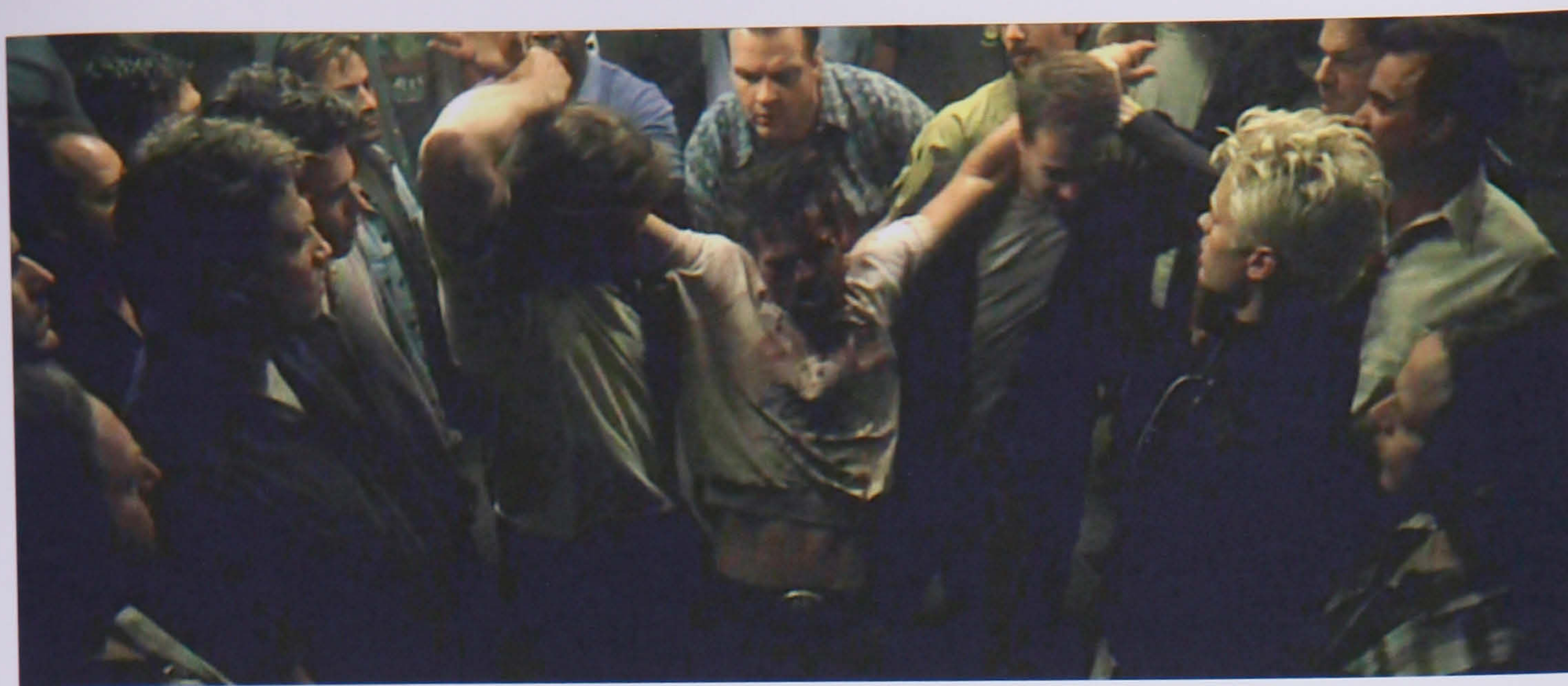


Figure 5.13 Christ-like Tyler Durden and his disciples in *Fight Club*

car's occupants to say what they would wish to have done if they died now. Jack does not know, but Tyler persists, asking him what he would feel like if he died now. Jack responds, 'I wouldn't feel anything good about my life. Is that what you want to hear me say?' Again insufficient for Tyler, he continues playing 'chicken' with the traffic, and he and Jack wrestle with the wheel. Tyler attempts to convince Jack by explaining, 'Hitting bottom isn't a weekend-retreat. It's not a goddamn seminar. Stop trying to control everything, and just let go!'

The point Tyler is making is the need to go through with it to feel it. Jack removes his hand from the steering wheel, and the pair put on their seatbelts and sit back anticipating the impact; they await their fates just as the passive passengers on the in-flight safety card had. After the crash, Tyler drags Jack from the wreck, and in his voiceover, Jack states, 'I'd never been in a car accident. This must've been what all those people felt like before I filed them as statistics in my reports.' Thus, Jack has finally experienced what he had only talked about. The event gives meaning to part of the life he had lived to that point. More than this, it is an emotional high, or as Tyler describes it, 'We've just had a near-life experience.' As with the potentially fatal dangers of extreme sports, a moment like the car crash makes you realize you are alive. (Tyler makes a similar point when he threatens to kill a convenience store

worker, unless he goes back to college. Tyler tells Jack that, ‘Tomorrow will be the most beautiful day of Raymond K. Hessel’s life’ because he has survived a gun being put to his head.)³⁷ It is a tangibly real moment in contrast to ‘real life’, and corresponds to the extreme sports enthusiast’s belief that: ‘Free fall is much more real than everyday life’ (Lyng in Le Breton 2000, 3). Just as in *Crash*, pain and masochism (or self-destruction in Tyler’s words) attest to your being emotionally alive.

A more fundamental relationship between *Crash* and *Fight Club* is the shared concern for the sensual qualities of the scar, and body modification as control. Jack describes Marla as being like a ‘scratch on the roof of your mouth that would heal if only you could stop tonguing it; but you can’t’. Like Caillois’s similar analogy for the masochistic play instinct, it speaks the almost unspeakable: the desire to inflict ‘pain’ on yourself for pleasure. The fundamental precept, however, is the ability to control the sensation: to stop if it becomes too intense.

I mentioned earlier Tyler’s decision not to die without scars, and he sensuously imposes his will on Jack. Whilst making soap from human liposuction fat (a reference to ‘conventional’ body modification), Tyler licks his lips before taking Jack’s hand and kissing it. Tyler pours lye onto the moist area, and tells Jack that the chemical reaction will scar: the site of affection will be permanently etched. As the chemical burn takes hold, Jack speaks via voiceover: ‘Guided meditation worked for cancer, it could work for this.’ We see a lush green forest as Jack imagines away the hurt, but we cut back to Tyler shaking Jack’s hand and demanding, ‘Stay with the pain, don’t shut this out.’ Ordered to look at his hand, we witness the chemical bubbling the flesh into a scar.

³⁷ Henry A Giroux (2002, 269) comments that the scene fails to address the issue of why Raymond has dropped out of college, namely social depravation and inequality. However, the purpose of the scene is to show Tyler’s logic, hence Jack’s voiceover comment, ‘He had a plan, and it started to make sense in a Tyler sort of way.’

Again Jack tries to think of the green forest, but it bursts into flames; simultaneously, Tyler prevents the denial by insisting, 'This is your pain, this is your burning hand', and instructs Jack not to 'deal with this the way those dead people do'. Succinctly, those that are dying (and are deemed emotionally dead) disavow their pain; those that are alive (and truly live life) experience their pain. Jack shakes from the intensity of the burning, and his alter ego grips his wrist to prevent him escaping. Tyler explains that vinegar will neutralize the suffering, but there is a condition to being allowed it: 'First, you have to give up. First you have to know, not fear, know, that someday you're gonna die.' Protesting that Tyler does not know how it feels, Jack is shown Tyler's identically, lip-burned hand as he proclaims, 'It's only after we've lost everything that we're free to do anything' (figure 5.14) In an existentialist way, Jack is being told he can be free by accepting his fate. The scar is a symbol of thinking differently.

The same applies to the marks from *Fight Club*. Stared at when at work, Jack had spoken the following in voiceover: 'Yes, these are bruises from fighting. Yes, I'm comfortable with that. I am enlightened.' The philosophy is that by accepting pain as pain, it can potentially be enjoyed, and certainly not suffered. What is more, as in *Crash*, the cuts, bruises and scars sported by Jack in *Fight Club* announce the past pleasures, but convention reads them as suffering. That Jack has triumphed over the pain of the lye is confirmed every time he sees his hand. Conventions though, mean that the damaged flesh is part of the grammar of intolerable pain not eroticized pleasure. Nicola Rehling makes the same mistake when she charges *Fight Club* with 'displacing homoerotically charged moments, such as Tyler's kiss, onto a desexualised administering of pain' (2001). Such marks to the body are far from desexualized when seen in the context of BDSM. The wounds from *Fight Club* are also more than body damage. Sporting injuries may usually be shown off with pride,



Figure 5.14 Kiss-shaped scar of shared affection and suffering in *Fight Club*

but not for being glorious agony. The marks of Fight Club testify to its alternative status to that of sport. It is a sensual exploration of pain via a celebration of leaving behind safety and control, and experiencing a visceral extreme denied beyond the ruled safe haven of Fight Club.

Even the safety of conventional beauty is abandoned. Although ironic that Brad Pitt, the archetypal white male Adonis, should reject the image of the sculptured male torso in the Gucci ad, *Fight Club* does not depict the “sexercise” and “exersex” of the body beautiful (Featherstone 1982, 182).³⁸ Indeed, we can repeat Amy Taubin’s comment (1999a, 17), ‘Pitt ... has never been as exquisite as he is with a broken nose and blood streaming down his cut body’, and a still from the film confirms this (figure 5.15). However, Jack offers a more radical challenge. He talks of the ass of a raw recruit going from ‘cookie dough’ to being ‘carved out of wood’, but Fight Club is about testing the body’s limits not toning it. The repeated ordeals, not unrelated to the punishment of Nicholas in *The Game*, increasingly damage the body. Jack’s delicate frame becomes more muscularly defined, but his teeth work loose, his hair is pulled out, his eyes swell, and his face is constantly bruised (figure 5.16).

³⁸ David Fincher calls Brad Pitt ‘the ultimate guy’ (in Brooks 2002, 17).



Figure 5.15 Aestheticized suffering – the battered body of Tyler Durden in *Fight Club*



Figure 5.16 Is that what a man looks like? The increasingly damaged body of Jack in *Fight Club*

Unlike the body modification of scarring in *Crash*, or the aestheticized amputations of *Boxing Helena*, the dichotomy of beauty and disfigurement is maintained. When Tyler hugs a blond recruit after a successful Project Mayhem operation, the issue of the aestheticized body reaches an intolerable tension. In a fit of jealousy, Jack savagely beats the man at Fight Club. In slow motion, the camera circles the pair, and shot-reverse-shot point-of-view angles show the contenders as the noise of the crowd echoes and distorts. Sporadically, the sound of each blow thuds louder than the ambient cries. The crowd's stunned silent stares enhance the impression that this is the most sadistic moment of the film. Questioned by Tyler

about his actions, Jack responds, 'I felt like destroying something beautiful.'

The whole scene is at odds with the other fights in *Fight Club* through the lack of masochism beyond the opening blows. It is notable that the scene replicates a passage from *Raging Bull* where La Motta is jealous that his partner, Vickie (Cathy Moriarty), thinks his opponent, Tony Janiro (Kevin Mahon), is handsome. A slow-motion close-up during the fight shows La Motta bursting Janiro's nose when excessively pounding him. Afterwards, a man at ringside remarks, 'He ain't pretty no more.' Although Amy Taubin is pertinent to note that in *Fight Club*, 'As in Scorsese's films, the male body is feminised through masochism' (1999a, 17), the overlapping of themes in respect of these two scenes marks a point of divergence. La Motta becomes increasingly controlling of Vickie, but the next scene in *Fight Club* is the one when Jack lets go of the steering wheel and renounces control. In the subsequent scene, Tyler even leaves him, and Jack, like Nicholas in *The Game*, has begun a path to enlightenment, by embracing a masochistic relinquishing of control.

Playing with Roles

As I said at the beginning of the analysis of *Fight Club*, the film distorts reality. The final scene of the film begins where the opening scene had begun: Tyler with his gun in Jack's mouth. The bravura opening credits sequence had shown a shot travelling backwards from the sensors inside Jack's brain, out through his heavily perspiring brow, and along the gun barrel jammed between his jaws. That second time around we now know that Tyler and Jack are the same person alters our perceptions of the whole scene. We have just watched Jack fighting with Tyler in the parking lot of the building, and like the skirmishes at the club, it was a rough and tumble affair that cascaded around the space. Intercut between these now familiar images are revelatory black and white shots from CCTV cameras showing Jack fighting alone:

throwing himself through windows, kicking wildly at the air, and tossing himself down flights of stairs. The footage strikingly confirms Jack's duality, especially by cutting back to the pair fighting each other.

On reflecting on what we have seen in the film, we note a particularly BDSM oscillation in Jack's exploits: between top and bottom, punisher and punished. By fighting himself, Jack becomes a curious fusion of dominator and submissive. In a fluid exchange, he is the masochist in a BDSM liaison who visually confirms his control of the relationship. His transference from what he perceived to be the feminized culture of victimhood and support groups to the all-male Fight Club has prompted experimentation with his projection of masculinity. He has found in himself, both top and bottom, feminine and masculine.

A profitable comparison can be made with *Performance* (Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg, UK, 1970). East End gangster Chas (James Fox) is forced into hiding after killing Joey (Anthony Valentine), the business partner of his boss. Chas finds refuge in the home of the reclusive rock star Turner (Mick Jagger), who shares the house with two girlfriends, Pherber (Anita Pallenberg) and Lucy (Michèle Breton). Like *Fight Club*, the film fuses sexual identity with violence; in one scene, Chas, who is lying over homoerotic images of sportsmen, is repeatedly whipped with a belt by Joey, and intercut are scenes of Chas having sex with a woman, who is digging her nails into his back. Chas's macho bravado is contrasted with Turner's more sensual and sexually fluid nature, but Turner has lost his inner demon and aggressiveness. Peter Wollen has described their characters thus: 'Chas surrounds himself with an armour of masculinity to deny his own femaleness. Turner surrounds himself with a cocoon of femininity to deny his maleness, his violence' (1995, 23).

However, during his stay in the house, Chas hallucinates on magic mushrooms, and in the space of one night, accepts sexual advances from all three housemates. In

the play space of the enclosed, controlled sanctuary (he is afraid to leave because of repercussions from his boss), Chas lets go of his identity. Jack and Nicholas, in their respective Fincher films, do the same in their different forms of play.

The parallels between *Fight Club* and *Performance* become even more apparent in their conclusions. Jack realizes he has to shoot himself to kill Tyler. Firing the gun into his head, he wounds himself, but destroys his alter ego. Like *The Game*, he has to go through a surrogate suicide attempt, thus the denouement is the masochistic destruction of part of the self to liberate the whole being. In *Performance*, Chas shoots Turner, but although Chas appears to survive, and is escorted to his waiting gangster boss, it is Mick Jagger's face that looks back from inside the boss's Rolls Royce. In effect, the shooting still frees the whole being.

We should also note that formally, the 'death' of Turner echoes the opening of *Fight Club* in a remarkable way. Instead of the thought process leaving Jack's brain and exiting the head via the gun, we follow Chas's bullet as it enters Turner's head, passes through a fleshy tube of blood vessels, and exits by the shot cutting mysteriously to a view from the street below as Chas/Turner departs the house. The sense in both films is of the importance of shifting identities, with a split between interior and exterior. David Le Breton has written of extreme sports that when participants push themselves to and beyond their limits, 'the body becomes the alter ego, an adversary that has more or less its own will, and is forced into submission so as to obtain a performance from it' (2000, 5). Through Jack being the narrator, who voices his thoughts and is associated directly with the image of the brain, he takes on the mantle of the mental side in a battle against the physical body of Tyler. In effect, *Fight Club* re-enacts the demands of extreme sports by illustrating the struggle of the mind over body; it acts as a discourse on the strategies used to deal with pain: control through denial ('white ball of healing light'), or deny control and embrace pain as a

sensory event. What makes pleasure a pain, and what makes pain a pleasure is denied a philosophical explanation, and is decided by Tyler on the grounds of intensity: if it can be withstood, it is pleasure. That the film concentrates on the latter is what gives *Fight Club* its masochistic leaning. Like *The Game*, the plunge into suffering and endurance is life affirming and life transforming.

It is worth repeating, but this time in full, Le Breton's conceptualization of the mind/body split in extreme sports:

In a personal and often ferocious struggle the body has to be forced, knowing that the more scarred it is at the end, the more significant and more powerful will be the appreciation of the event. (2000, 5)

If this is so, masochistic sporting pursuits require Le Breton's 'personal creativity' (2000, 5) to provoke a Cartesian split of mind and body, subject and object. That *Fight Club* can be considered to fictionalize the split via Jack and Tyler might indicate a successful mediation on the masochistic joys of extreme sports, but a problem remains.

Although I have noted the unacknowledged high frequency of the controlled body in mainstream cinema, these two David Fincher films are rare for their concerted articulation of themes relating to it. Adaptations of traditional sport and play narratives, they harness the twin pursuits of video games and extreme sports, which draw heavily on the masochistic impulses.³⁹ However, both *The Game* and *Fight Club* blur reality, utilizing the doubt in a way that partially disguises the masochism. In *The Game*, Nicholas is unsure as to whether or not it is really a scam, and so his masochistic enduring of the trials in the 'game' are partially excused by his belief he is protecting his investments. Similarly, in *Fight Club*, Jack is retrospectively seen as having been suffering from delusions, rather than willingly

³⁹ The suitability of the comparison with games was not lost on the film producers: *The Game* was briefly considered as a template for an interactive CD-ROM (Swallow 2003, 111), and it was suggested that a beat-em-up fighting video game could be based on *Fight Club* (Swallow 2003, 140).

pursuing masochistic pleasures. It would appear then, that although both films reveal the masochistic thrills of play that are usually hidden in competitive sport, a false reality acts as a conceit for the depiction. Rather than making the masochistic desires explicit, we enjoy the loss of control with a disavowal not based on sport but ambiguity. Although certainly more exposed to what are deemed the subversive thrills of male masochism, we retain a comfort zone: no longer fabricated on sporting contest, but anchored in a belief that they are not quite knowable. Elaine Scarry may not have meant it this way, but pain retains its ‘unsharability’ (1985, 4).

Conclusion

When I began researching this thesis, I was convinced a group of films existed that took up the challenge of depicting contemporary anxieties (perceived or real) regarding not feeling in control, most especially in respect of autonomy. Nonetheless, there always remained a fear I was chasing a chimera, not because the topic was not addressed in the cinema, but that the notion of control would become so flexible it would have no validity, and that instances of tattooing or artistic murder would be just that, isolated pockets overwhelmed by other aspects of the narrative. What I hope to have offered is a corroborating argument in support of my initial intuition, and by so doing, have revealed a specific mode of control that operates through a marking of the skin and a revelling in the corporeal.

In the course of my investigations additional films have come along that have warranted inspection. Some of these films confirmed ideas; others challenged them. Where *Sick*, *8mm* and Jeffrey A. Brown's findings in respect of Mel Gibson (2002) suggested male masochism was becoming more prominent and explicit, *Romance*, *La Pianiste*, *Secretary* and *Swept Away*, with various degrees of subtlety, reasserted the convenience and surety of female masochism when explicitly part of BDSM. Over the same period, the artistic serial killer subgenre began to wither, but its themes persist, with its links to other areas of my research becoming stronger. *Tattoo* (Robert Schwentke, 2002), a German film about to be released in the UK,¹ combines elements of body modification, serial killing and an implication of BDSM. The flayed, tattooed skins of victims become the objects of display, and although more like Schneider's description of 'artistic product' (2001, 71) than the artistic crime scene, the gallery of tattooed human skins (figure 6.1) stresses notions of beauty and

¹ The film has previously been shown at Frightfest 2003.



Figure 6.1 Gallery of tattooed human skins in *Tattoo* (2002)

aestheticized suffering that reference *Anatomie* and the work of von Hagens.² It is also worth noting that *Red Dragon*, the remake of *Manhunter*, reinstates the book's significant detail of the killer's tattooed back: a body modification that suggests both art and his control over the body. The coalescing of ideas is thus a partial confirmation of my agenda, which regards it as meaningful to investigate the various themes of painful control as a unified concept.

Changes also have taken place over the past three years in respect of the subcultures that have helped shape my appreciation of the controlled body. It is particularly evident that the mainstreaming of body modification has continued. Tattoos and piercings have become the mainstays of high profile celebrities (David Beckham, Robbie Williams, Britney Spears and Angelina Jolie), and Selfridges, the exclusive department store, has gained a permanent tattoo and piercing parlour.³ The debates surrounding controlling the body image have therefore continued to prosper.

When I started to formulate my project, it was apparent that three basic concerns underlay my interest in the controlled body, and these were to inform the range of

² It will also be interesting to see how a proposed David Cronenberg project, provisionally called *Painkillers*, and which is based around a performance artist, fits into my construction of the controlled body.

³ The parlour was originally intended to be only temporary as part of the Body Craze exhibition held in 2003, but it proved so popular it has been retained.

investigations that spiralled out to constitute my thesis. Each of the three initial queries was unfeasibly broad in scope, and therefore could not be answered in its original form, but it is helpful to momentarily retrace the network of inquiries that transpired to these primary questions, for it will guide an understanding of how the debates are interlinked.

Firstly, and quite simply, I wondered what types of pain and suffering were being aestheticized in these films. Torment and agony are not new to film, and indeed are central to many strands of cinema, including the woman's picture (paranoia, persecution and illness), war films (battles and casualties) and disaster movies (heroic sacrifice and innocent victims) to name just three. However, in their linking of pain, pleasure and beautification, none of these are as graphic (both in terms of spectacle and explicitness) as the controlled body films, so I contemplated what was at stake in such instances. Of special interest was the relationship between body image and personal identity, including how pain and endurance map out conceptions of autonomy. It was obvious that to force pain onto someone suggests control over him/her, but does choosing pain reverse the equation and establish autonomy? And how is the suffering specifically tied into our understanding of attractiveness?

The second question I wished to clarify was how these depictions fitted into the historic moment they emerged from. Were there traces of the films' concerns in other media and the broader culture that might offer a point of explanation for them? The correspondence between cinematic representations and the culture they originate from cannot simply be reduced to a cause and effect relationship, but social film history has shown the potency of examining the connection to aid our comprehension of the images. The methodology was soon justified when it became apparent that the films not only fitted into the debates already being discussed in relation to the other

media, but in some instances, were even employing these discussions within their narratives. With many of the attitudes towards pain emerging from various subcultures, my focus of interest turned towards whether mainstream films, being part of the officially sanctioned culture, would reflect or reinterpret their ideas.

And thirdly, I was interested in how we, as spectators, experience the controlled and suffering body depicted on the screen. What narrative strategies and pleasures were involved? But also, I wanted to ponder the cognitive strategies. The latter was never intended to be more than a speculative, theoretical examination; I did not envisage audience research, or scientific investigation, but I was interested in discourses relating to spectatorial identification, as well as the developments in art history and film studies that posit a sensorial engagement with images beyond the purely visual. One further component also intrigued me, and became a major structural feature of my research: I wanted to examine the instances of the controlled body outside the psychosexual theoretical approaches more usually applied to cinematic depictions of pain. I therefore founded my analysis on historically, socially and culturally situated readings.

The answers to these three problems could not be bracketed so neatly as the descriptions above imply, for what my research found was a complex interweaving of aspects of each of them in the construction of cinema's controlled body. As a methodology to uncover these relationships, I utilized an interdisciplinary approach with which I attempted to dissolve some of the boundaries between the filmic text, other visual arts (paintings, conceptual art and performance art) and (sub)culturally displayed signs of painful pleasures (tattoos, scars, sporting injuries and BDSM paraphernalia). Consequently, these other activities have been addressed in detail in a way that reflects my desire to appreciate context as much as text, and which situates the films within an understanding of social realities. Although embracing such an

osmotic transference of ideas, by studying quite a diverse collection of films, some of my findings, unsurprisingly, have a discrete pertinence to the respective topics of individual chapters (BDSM, body modification, artistic murders and play). However, these conclusions should not be overlooked in the pursuit of a template for the controlled body, for even in their specificity, they have relevance to the depiction of the painful pleasures, and are discoveries worthy of noting.

Throughout this thesis, it has been proposed that it is possible to speak of sadism and masochism in the movies without recourse to film studies' familiar application of Freudian and Lacanian language. By examining the social practice of BDSM I have endeavoured to chart its cinematic depiction, both in its explicit form and when immersed in sadism but interpreted/enjoyed by BDSMers as BDSM iconography. BDSM does not provide an alternative language though, so at times I have had to resort to psychosexual phrases. I only regard this as unfortunate if the reader has lost sight of how I have shown that scenes of torment and domination are far more nebulous affairs than psychoanalysis has accounted for. They can be read and enjoyed as a dynamic of power and powerlessness, thus experienced as a spectacle with fluid spectatorial positions, and not limited to a sadistic gaze or masochistic identification. In *Secretary*, for example, when Lee Holloway is bent over a desk and spanked by Mr Grey, we are offered a spectacle of control, and the emotional charge of the interplay is the major pleasure of identification, not the locking of oneself to the position of either top or bottom in their relationship. The flexibility of such a strategy of identification allows BDSMers to satisfactorily appropriate depictions of sadism as BDSM pleasures.

We have also seen that explicit BDSM is almost universally depicted as deviant and dangerous through being linked to oppressive regimes (Nazism, prisons, religious institutions) and the underbelly of society. *8mm* provides a potent example

in its merging of BDSM with snuff. However, the very negativity is what also supports BDSM. As Anne McClintock states, BDSM is a 'theatre of conversion' (1993, 208), borrowing the negativity to heighten its performance of control. Paradoxically, mainstream cinema's representations give BDSM a status it probably does not deserve, but one BDSMers ardently exploit. Thus, Paul Gebhard states that BDSMers 'prefer to remain mysteriously secret, considering themselves a hidden elite' (in Mass 1983, 46). A sense of deviancy is therefore an aspect of BDSM's currency. But this is only part of the equation. Media depictions (especially cinematic) tend to neglect its normalcy. *Sick* and *Secretary* reinstate it. BDSM is usually not done, and certainly not solely, to be transgressive. It has the potential to challenge gender roles, but is done consensually because it is fun and is frequently part of a loving relationship; *Sick* and *Secretary* acknowledge these aspects of the supposedly deviant painful pleasures of BDSM. For the most part, mainstream cinema borrows the 'shock' of BDSM, and replaces consent with oppression.

My studies of the representations of body modification disclosed similar eschewals of the meanings embedded in the social practices they mimic. The essential difference was the avoidance of body modification as a statement of autonomy. Personal meanings of commitment and selfhood through controlling the body via markings were transferred onto signs of domination. Glimpses of self-determination appeared, for example, via Max Cady in *Cape Fear* and discussions of Modern Primitives in *Strangeland*, but more commonly, body modification graphically signalled the control by another. The very central issue of a masochistic pleasure in your pain was lost, and this was a theme repeated across the four topics that composed my analysis of the controlled body.

The artistic serial killer subgenre made the correlation between beauty and the suffering body foundational to its pleasures. More than even Bob Flanagan's

performance art, these films reflected on the idea that art is sensorial beyond visibility. Compelled by narrative structures (e.g. working the crime scene and referencing art) and formal strategies (e.g. lingering looks and framing tormented bodies), we watch and marvel at the spectacle of suffering. The control of the killer is manifested in the crime's formalism, but such creativity reassures by making serial killing comprehensible, and solvable for the investigating aesthete. The suffering body thus becomes a battleground for the control of meaning of the crime. Furthermore, the stress placed upon observation offers a legitimation of Western society's increasingly invasive monitoring of actions: a process that can be regarded as a factor in prompting many of the subcultural pursuits that are invested in personal control.

The chapter on play also provided distinctive findings in respect of the controlled body. It revealed the suitability of a distinct play space outside 'real life' in which to experiment with temporarily abandoning control. At the same time, the rigidly ruled environment offered, at times, the illusion of control. We noted in particular how *The Game* fed into regularly vocalized comments by video gamers that such games offer a control denied in the remainder of society, and yet we saw how the 'hard rails' and 'soft rails' of games reveal the control to be limited, but comforting because of the unbending rules. Similarly, *Fight Club* was defined by its rules, and both films articulated the allure of painful pleasures.

While each of these four central chapters explore their separate themes, bringing them together for analysis under the rubric of the controlled body demonstrates that certain discourses concerning control, and the representation of painful pleasures, recur across the texts. It becomes apparent from such an examination that the subject of pain as an essence of being is under investigation. Ted Polhemus has stated that 'In an age which increasingly shows signs of being out of control, the most

fundamental sphere of control is re-employed: mastery over one's own body' (in Polhemus and Randall 1996, 38). Bob Flanagan graphically displays this in *Sick* as he temporarily takes the production of pain away from cystic fibrosis, and replaces it with his choices of BDSM and performance. In the jaded and relentless traffic-filled world of *Crash*, the Ballards confirm their existence via the pain of an automobile accident. In the artistic serial killer films, the victims may have little choice (although notably, the most refined example, *Se7en*, deploys corporeal choices in the Greed, Lust and Pride murders), but the killer demonstrates his existence via his controlled artistry over the body. And both *The Game* and *Fight Club* position the abandonment of control as an affirmative choice.

A major factor alongside autonomy was the issue of beauty. I have already recorded how it structures the artistic serial killer subgenre, but its relevance is all-encompassing. The battered face of Brad Pitt in *Fight Club* critiques the ideology of body aesthetics. The same can be said of the following: the performance by Flanagan when he challenges 'can Arnold do this?', the camera's loving gaze upon the scars in *Crash*, and the staged serial killer murder scenes. The films explore an elemental Western thought: body image and its relationship to identity. *Tattoo* and *Boxing Helena* confirm this, with both films choosing a destroyed body image to convey utter domination and loss of control. The additional component the films mentioned above have, is an investment in the corporeal as part of identity, especially whereby pain brings authenticity. Where *Tattoo* is mere surface, *Crash* envelopes itself with a need to feel: to 'make it ragged and dirty'. In this sense, even when talking of aesthetics, the suggestion of pain as part of that control is vital. Whether the mark is from BDSM, conscious refigurement, a bout at Fight Club, or the wounds of a martyred saint at a crime scene, the suffering is coded with meaning and evokes a memory that contains that pain.

Complementing the attitude towards beauty, we saw that sexual and gender identity is challenged by the controlled body. We noted that *Crash* exploits the BDSM practice of utilizing sites of body modification as additional or enhanced erogenous zones, and that these orientate sexual activities away from penetrative sex. Bob Flanagan does much the same via his art installation *The Scaffold* (see figure 2.13) and *Fight Club* explicitly asks of the familiar image of masculinity, 'Is that what a man looks like?'⁴ However, the treatment of gender only becomes a unifying factor when seen in respect of masochism.

I commented in Chapter 2 how BDSM 'reveals the arbitrary nature of defining active as male and passive as female'; the controlled body has a similar potential for disclosure. The (sub)cultural activities of BDSM, non-mainstream body modification, and extreme sports, all blatantly acknowledge that their pleasures and control involve enjoying submitting to pain. The cinematic controlled body is not always so honest. Masochism may be recognizable, but it is frequently justified in ways other than pleasure. Thus, the painful pleasures of popular subcultural pursuits are frequently corrupted into sadistic assault (*Tattoo*, *Boxing Helena*, *Strangeland*). Furthermore, it is especially noticeable that male masochism is subject to disavowal (including being hidden behind the dominatrix, concealed by the decoy of the suffering woman (*8mm*), masked behind the necessity of investigation (voyeuristic duty amidst admiration in *Manhunter*, *Se7en*, *Resurrection*),⁵ or overwhelmed by ambiguity (self-preservation in *The Game*, delusions in *Fight Club*). It appears that male masochism remains tainted by the gender divide imposed by Freud and Krafft-Ebing (and most subsequent psychoanalysis). A male finding a pleasure in pain is deemed unnatural. Thus, in mainstream cinema, the resisting stoic male retains his

⁴ *Fight Club* also revels in the gender ambiguity of its all-male world.

⁵ Tom Welles's masochistic impulse in *8mm* is also withheld by the pretext of investigation, but in that instance based upon professionalism.

masculinity, but the male masochist, who loves enduring the pain, is deemed weak not strong. Such reasoning might explain why consent is conspicuous by its absence in most depictions of the male controlled body, and if present, such as in *Fight Club*, the narratives retain other legitimating features. What is clear though, is that all these films, plus those that are more transparent in their interest in pursuits of endurance and suffering, get their emotional charge and spectacularity from painful pleasures.

A question remains though as to why the aestheticized suffering has such an appeal. Fundamentally, the notion that pain can be pleasurable challenges a major tenet of current Western thinking. Pain is now generally seen as something to be avoided and overcome, not embraced. However, a founding principle of Modern Primitivism, and one that seems pertinent (even if the equating with a primitive ideal is fanciful), is that if we are denied meaningful pain, we will construct our own rites of passage. The cinematic controlled body tries to negotiate the cultural anxiety generated by these opposing opinions. The films address the search for meaning in pain, but frequently the narrative endeavours to blur the intent. Rare instances do, however, allow the quest for pain to become an assertion of selfhood and identity.

More than a mere frisson, the pain generates meaning, and the marked body articulates it. Elaine Scarry states that 'To have pain is to have *certainity*' (1985, 13), and in that sense, a pleasure of pain is the affirmation of living. But the pain of the controlled body is, it would seem, also about dying. The films recognize the importance of mortality, and raid fine art, conceptual art, BDSM, body modification, and extreme play (both video games and sports), because they too address how we concretize the significance of death. What is at stake is the sensation of exposing oneself to events that reveal the fragility of the body and life itself. These moments create an intensity that the marked body records the memory of. Le Breton sees these instances in extreme sports as 'extracting from Death or physical exhaustion, the

guarantee of a life lived fully' (2000, 7), and so he sees them reinstating death as a meaningful part of life. It is noticeable that the more positive case study films locate the pleasures of pain alongside a discourse of dying. *Sick* is structured around Flanagan rebuffing the onslaught of CF with his own pain, and confronting something we all have: a dying body. In *Fight Club*, the narrator has to kill part of himself to flourish, and in *The Game*, Nicholas has to go through his own death to be reborn. And *Crash* is premised on extracting a sense of passion and life from approaching death asymptotically.⁶ In addition, the serial killer films are quite explicitly about confronting death and the body's vulnerability. The aestheticism makes the process more acceptable, but no less traumatic. As Maria Tatar states:

In looking at murder victims, it is easy enough to become transfixed by the sight of a body in the state of biological disintegration – to experience a secret sense of pleasure at having escaped that destiny, and to observe that pleasure turn to fear and revulsion as we contemplate the sight of the inevitable fate of our own bodies. (1995, 13)

Again, some films are more self-assured about asserting how integral death is to life. In *Se7en*, John Doe chooses death to give meaning to his life (and life's work), but Rhyme in *The Bone Collector* changes his mind about terminating his life: rather than a great act of control, the film treats suicide as a failing.

So, what of the pleasures for us as spectators? I have located instances of spectacular suffering, and attempted to ascertain the social and ideological influences that prompt our compulsion to observe, whilst identifying how we negotiate the pain of the subject, whether performer, masochist, player or victim. In the artistic serial killer subgenre, narrative traits justify our looking, yet along with the investigator, we still develop an empathetic, but masochistic, experiencing of the subjection of the victim.

⁶ *8mm* by contrast has perhaps lost some of its significance because of a change from the original script, which had Tom Welles drive his car into a concrete lane divider (Swallow 2003, 85).

How then do we engage with the pain? The spectacle of the controlled suffering is quite specific in these films, and it is what has enabled me to identify the link to contemporary pursuits. The films draw on select practices that are already saturated with pain: we are familiar with the iconography of BDSM and religious suffering, and these are convenient for suggesting heightened sensations. And they are sensations, for they are not truly pain but an exquisite pain, for these, and the adrenalin highs of extreme sports and body modification, embody potential pleasures, ecstasies even. The choice of referent is therefore central to our pleasures when watching the controlled body.

In addition to representing pursuits that construct pain as an enjoyable experience, formal strategies attempt to make the pain tangible. In Chapter 4, I discussed the work of Laura Marks and Vivian Sobchack in respect of sensing the suffering body at the crime scene, but their remarks apply equally to Catherine digging her nail into James's damaged knee in *Crash*, and Jack wiggling his loose tooth in *Fight Club*. We are at once observer and the subject sensing the pain and the control. It might lack the intensity of the actual act, but we sense the urge to feel the oscillation between pain and release. We do not really want pain, but we want the feeling that makes you feel alive. More than mere tension, we feel embodied in the action: an action that takes control, and procures some awareness of autonomy. In *Sick*, Bob Flanagan's father encapsulates the sensation when he compares watching his son's act with seeing a trapeze artist:

I get excited ... I get scared ... I get that feeling that he's going to fall. The same with ... Butch [Bob] when ... he sticks the needles in himself: *I feel the pain*. Then he lands on his feet, and ... I am proud because all of a sudden everybody's applauding ... because of what he's done. And I think he's doing this to say to God, or whoever there is out there, 'You son of a bitch, what you've done to me, let me show you, I'll do my tumblersaults and I'm coming back at you. And this is my ... way of telling you to go fuck yourself'. (Emphasis added)

Like Bob's father, we feel Bob's pain, and we recognize his control, not just over his body, but, temporarily, over his destiny. His actions give pain purpose, value and significance: something lost in our medicalized construction of suffering.

The controlled body, with its emphasis on spectacular painful pleasures can be summarized as cinema's engagement with the discourses that question how we conceptualize corporeality. The films depict and interpret pursuits that make pain pleasurable, whilst simultaneously the films try to tap into these pleasures (or at least the desires for them) by attempting to make tangible the spectacular pains represented. Both these strands of the cinematic text are orientated around rethinking our relationship with pain, and see control as made manifest through marking the body. The films of the controlled body disclose our anxiety over being increasingly remote from the experiences of pain and death. But they also reflect a desire to continue the process of mastering both, no longer in a medicalized sense, but through making these traumatic events sites of significance. For all its concentration on the corporeal, the controlled body is about denying the purely biological, and reinstating an ethical and political context. Certainly, it is a revolt against the anaesthetized and medicalized fabrication that saps pain of its sensorial and metaphysical properties, but it is also part of the same desire to master the corporeal, and our inevitable destiny. What is evident is that the pleasure of pain and suffering is inextricably situated in a personal search for control.

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Primary Filmography

Blowback

Dir. Mark L. Lester, Prod. American World Pictures/Lions Gate Films, Inc., Canada/USA, 1999. Writer: Jeffrey Goldenberg, Bob Held, Randall Frakes. Cinematography: Jacques Haitkin. Original music: Sean Callery. Main cast: Mario Van Peebles (Insp. Don Morrell), James Remar (John Matthew Whitman/Schmidt), Sharisse Baker (Det. Monica Ricci), Stephen Caffrey (Fake Agent Norwood).

The Bone Collector

Dir. Phillip Noyce, Prod. Universal/Columbia, USA, 1999. Writer: Jeremy Iacone (Novel: Jeffery Deaver). Cinematography: Dean Semler. Original music: Craig Armstrong. Main cast: Denzel Washington (Lincoln Rhyme), Angelina Jolie (Amelia Donaghy), Queen Latifah (Thelma), Michael Rooker (Capt. Howard Cheney), Mike McGlone (Det. Kenny Solomon), Leland Orser (Richard Thompson).

Boxing Helena

Dir. Jennifer Chambers Lynch, Prod. Entertainment/Main Line, USA, 1993. Writer: Jennifer Chambers Lynch (Story: Philippe Caland). Cinematography: Frank Byers. Original music: Graeme Revell. Main cast: Julian Sands (Dr Nick Cavanaugh), Sherilyn Fenn (Helena), Bill Paxton (Ray O'Malley), Art Garfunkel (Dr Lawrence Augustine).

Cape Fear

Dir. Martin Scorsese, Prod. Universal/Amblin/Cappa/Tribeca, USA, 1991. Writer: Wesley Strick (Novel: John D. MacDonald; Screenplay: James R. Webb). Cinematography: Freddie Francis. Original music: Bernard Herrmann. Main cast: Robert De Niro (Max Cady), Nick Nolte (Sam Bowden), Jessica Lange (Leigh Bowden), Juliette Lewis (Danielle Bowden).

The Cell

Dir. Tarsem Singh, Prod. New Line/Radical Media, USA/Germany, 2000. Writer: Mark Protosevich. Cinematography: Paul Laufer. Original music: Howard Shore. Main cast: Jennifer Lopez (Catherine Deane), Vince Vaughn (Agent Peter Novak), Vincent D'Onofrio (Carl Stargher).

Copycat

Dir. Jon Amiel, Prod. Warner/New Regency/Monarchy, USA, 1995. Writer: Ann Biderman, David Madsen. Cinematography: Laszlo Kovacs. Original music: Christopher Young. Main cast: Sigourney Weaver (Helen Hudson), Holly Hunter (M. J. Monahan), Dermot Mulroney (Reuben Goetz), William McNamara (Peter Foley), Harry Connick, Jr (Daryll Lee Cullum).

Crash

Dir. David Cronenberg, Prod. Columbia TriStar/Alliance, Canada, 1996. Writer: David Cronenberg (Novel: J. G. Ballard). Cinematography: Peter Suschitzky. Original music: Howard Shore. Main cast: James Spader (James Ballard), Holly Hunter (Dr Helen Remington), Elias Koteas (Vaughan), Deborah Kara Unger (Catherine Ballard), Rosanna Arquette (Gabrielle).

8mm

Dir. Joel Schumacher. Prod. Columbia, USA, 1999. Writer: Andrew Kevin Walker.

Cinematography: Robert Elswit. Original music: Mychael Danna. Main cast: Nicolas Cage (Tom Welles), Joaquin Phoenix (Max California), James Gandolfini (Eddie Poole), Peter Stormare (Dino Velvet), Anthony Heald (Longdale), Chris Bauer (George Higgins/Machine), Catherine Keener (Amy Welles), Amy Morton (Janet Mathews), Jenny Powell (Mary Anne Mathews).

eXistenZ

Dir. David Cronenberg, Prod. Miramax/Alliance Atlantis/Serendipity Point/Natural Nylon, UK/Canada, 1999. Writer: David Cronenberg. Cinematography: Peter Sushitzky. Original music: Howard Shore. Main cast: Jennifer Jason Leigh (Allegra Geller), Jude Law (Ted Pikul), Willem Dafoe (Gas).

Fight Club

Dir. David Fincher, Prod. TCF/Fox 2000/Regency, USA/Germany, 1999. Writer: Jim Uhls (Novel: Chuck Palahniuk). Cinematography: Jeff Cronenweth. Original music: Dust Brothers. Main cast: Brad Pitt (Tyler Durden), Edward Norton (Narrator/Jack), Helena Bonham Carter (Marla Singer), Meat Loaf Aday (Robert Paulsen), Jared Leto (Angel Face).

The Game

Dir. David Fincher, Prod. Polygram/Propaganda, USA, 1997. Writer: John Brancato, Michael Ferris. Cinematography: Harris Savides. Original music: Howard Shore. Main cast: Michael Douglas (Nicholas Van Orton), Sean Penn (Conrad Van Orton), Deborah Kara Unger (Christine), James Rebhorn (Jim Feingold), Armin Mueller-Stahl (Anson Baer), Daniel Schorr (Himself).

Manhunter

Dir. Michael Mann, Prod. Recorded Releasing/Red Dragon/De Laurentiis Entertainment, USA, 1986. Writer: Michael Mann (Novel: Thomas Harris). Cinematography: Dante Spinotti. Original music: Michel Rubini, The Reds. Main cast: William Petersen (Will Graham), Kim Greist (Molly Graham), Joan Allen (Reba), Brian Cox (Dr Hannibal Lecktor), Dennis Farina (Jack Crawford), Tom Noonan (Francis Dollarhyde/Tooth Fairy).

Il portiere di notte/The Night Porter

Dir. Liliana Cavani, Prod. Lotar Films, Italy, 1973. Writer: Liliana Cavani, Italo Moscati. Cinematography: Alfio Contini. Original music: Daniele Paris. Main cast: Dirk Bogarde (Max), Charlotte Rampling (Lucia), Philippe Leroy (Klaus).

Resurrection

Dir. Russell Mulcahy, Prod. Interlight Pictures/Baldwin-Cohen Productions, USA, 1999. Writer: Brad Mirman (Story: Christopher Lambert, Brad Mirman). Cinematography: Jonathan Freeman. Original music: James McGrath. Main cast: Christopher Lambert (John Prudhomme), Leland Orser (Det. Andrew Hollinsworth), David Cronenberg (Father Rousell), Demus (Robert Joy).

Secretary

Dir. Steven Shainberg, Prod. Double A Films/SloughPond Co./Twopoundbag Prods., USA, 2002. Writer: Erin Cressida Wilson (Short story: Mary Gaitskill; Story adaptation: Steven Shainberg, Erin Cressida Wilson). Cinematography: Steven Fierberg. Original music: Angelo Badalamenti. Main cast: James Spader (E. Edward Grey), Maggie Gyllenhaal (Lee Holloway), Jeremy Davies (Peter).

Se7en

Dir. David Fincher, Prod. New Line, USA, 1995. Writer: Andrew Kevin Walker. Cinematography: Darius Khondji. Original music: Howard Shore. Main cast: Brad Pitt (Det. David Mills), Morgan Freeman (Det. Lt. William Somerset), Kevin Spacey (John Doe), Gwyneth Paltrow (Tracy Mills).

Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan, Supermasochist

Dir. Kirby Dick, Prod. Kirby Dick/Peter Norton/Art Matters, USA, 1997. Cinematography: Jonathan Dayton, Kirby Dick, Sheree Rose, Geza Sinkovics. Original music: Blake Leyh. Main cast: Bob Flanagan (Himself), Sheree Rose (Herself).

The Silence of the Lambs

Dir. Jonathan Demme, Prod. Rank/Orion/Strong Heart/Demme, USA, 1991. Writer: Ted Tally (Novel: Thomas Harris). Cinematography: Tak Fujimoto. Original music: Howard Shore. Main cast: Jodie Foster (Clarice Starling), Anthony Hopkins (Dr Hannibal Lecter), Scott Glenn (Jack Crawford), Ted Levine (Buffalo Bill/Jame Gumb).

Strangeland

Dir. John Pieplow, Prod. The Shooting Gallery, USA, 1998. Writer: Dee Snider. Cinematography: Goran Pavicevic. Original music: Anton Sanko. Main cast: Dee Snider (Capt. Howdy/Carleton Hendricks), Kevin Gage (Mike Gage), Brett Harrelson (Steve Christian), Elizabeth Peña (Toni Gage), Robert Englund (Jackson Roth).

Tattoo

Dir. Bob Brooks, Prod. Joseph E. Levine, USA, 1981. Writer: Joyce Buñuel (Story by Bob Brooks). Cinematography: Arthur Ornitz. Original music: Barry de Vorzon. Main cast: Bruce Dern (Karl Kinsky), Maud Adams (Maddy), Leonard Frey (Halsey).

White of the Eye

Dir. Donald Cammell, Prod. Elliott Kastner, UK, 1987. Writer: China and Donald Cammell (Novel: Margaret Tracy). Cinematography: Alan Jones (aka Larry McConkey). Original music: Nick Mason, Rick Fenn. Main cast: David Keith (Paul White), Cathy Moriarty (Joan White), Art Evans (Det. Charles Mendoza), Alan Rosenberg (Mike Desantos), Bob Zache (Lucas Herman).

Secondary Filmography

The Abominable Dr Phibes. Dir. Robert Fuest, UK, 1971.

After Hours. Dir. Martin Scorsese, USA, 1985.

L'Âge d'or. Dir. Luis Buñuel, France, 1930.

Ai no Corrida/In the Realm of the Senses. Dir. Nagisa Oshima, Japan/France, 1976.

Aladdin. Dir. Ron Clements and John Musker, USA, 1992.

Alien. Dir. Ridley Scott, UK, 1979.

Along Came a Spider. Dir. Lee Tamahori, USA, 2001.

American Beauty. Dir. Sam Mendes, USA, 1999.

American Psycho. Dir. Mary Harron, USA/Canada, 2000.

Anatomie/Anatomy. Dir. Stefan Ruzowitzky, Germany, 2000.

¡Atame!/Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!. Dir. Pedro Almodóvar, Spain, 1989.

Badlands. Dir. Terrence Malick, USA, 1973.

Bad Lieutenant. Dir. Abel Ferrara, USA, 1992.

Barb Wire. Dir. David Hogan, USA, 1996.

Batman Returns. Dir. Tim Burton, USA, 1992.

Battle Royale. Dir. Kenji Fukasaku, Japan, 2000.

Being John Malkovich. Dir. Spike Jonze, UK/USA, 1999.

Belle de jour. Dir. Luis Buñuel, France/Italy, 1967.

The Big Doll House. Dir. Jack Hill, USA, 1971.

The Blackbird. Dir. Tod Browning, USA, 1926.

Blade Runner. Dir. Ridley Scott, USA, 1982.

The Blood of Fu Manchu. Dir. Jesús Franco, USA/UK/Spain/West Germany, 1968.

Blowback. Dir. Mark L. Lester, Canada/USA, 1999. [See also primary filmography]

Blue Hawaii. Dir. Norman Taurog, USA, 1961.

Blue Steel. Dir. Kathryn Bigelow, USA, 1990.

Blue Velvet. Dir. David Lynch, USA, 1986.

Body of Evidence. Dir. Uli Edel, USA, 1992.

The Bone Collector. Dir. Phillip Noyce, USA, 1999. [See also primary filmography]

Bone Daddy. Dir. Mario Azzopardi, USA/Canada, 1998.

Boxing Helena. Dir. Jennifer Chambers Lynch, USA, 1993. [See also primary filmography]

Braveheart. Dir. Mel Gibson, USA, 1995.

A Bucket of Blood. Dir. Roger Corman, USA, 1959.

Bucket of Blood/Dark Secrets/The Death Artist. Dir. Michael J. McDonald, USA, 1995.

Cape Fear. Dir. Martin Scorsese, USA, 1991. [See also primary filmography]

The Cell. Dir. Tarsem Singh, USA/Germany, 2000. [See also primary filmography]

Charlie's Angels. Dir. McG, USA/Germany, 2000.

Circus of Horrors. Dir. Sidney Hayers, UK, 1960.

Cliffhanger. Dir. Renny Harlin, USA, 1993.

The Collector. Dir. William Wyler, USA/UK, 1965.

Coma. Dir. Michael Crichton, USA, 1978.

Copycat. Dir. Jon Amiel, USA, 1995. [See also primary filmography]

Crash. Dir. David Cronenberg, Canada, 1996. [See also primary filmography]

Crippled Masters. Dir. Joe Law, Hong Kong, [1984?].

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon/Wo Hu Zang Long. Dir. Ang Lee, China/Taiwan/USA, 2000.

Cruising. Dir. William Friedkin, USA, 1980.

Crumb. Dir. Terry Zwigoff, USA, 1994.

Dances Sacred and Profane. Dir. Dan Jury and Mark Jury, USA, 1985.

Dark City. Dir. Alex Proyas, USA, 1998.

Dawn of the Dead. Dir. George A. Romero, USA, 1979.

Dead Ringers. Dir. David Cronenberg, Canada, 1988.

The Dead Zone. Dir. David Cronenberg, USA, 1983.

Death Race 2000. Dir. Paul Bartel, USA, 1975.

La decima vittima/The Tenth Victim. Dir. Elio Petri, Italy/France, 1965.

Deranged. Dir. Jeff Gillen and Alan Ormsby, USA, 1974.

De Sade. Dir. Cy Endfield [and Roger Corman (uncredited)], West Germany/USA, 1969.

The Devils. Dir. Ken Russell, UK, 1971.

Die Jungfrau und die Peitsche/Eugénie ... The Story of Her Journey into Perversion. Dir. Jesús Franco, Spain/West Germany/UK, 1970.

Dirty Harry. Dir. Don Siegel, USA, 1971.

Donovan's Reef. Dir. John Ford, USA, 1963.

Dragonwyck. Dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz, USA, 1946.

The Driller Killer. Dir. Abel Ferrara, USA, 1979.

8mm. Dir. Joel Schumacher, USA, 1999. [See also primary filmography]

El Cid. Dir. Anthony Mann, USA/Spain, 1961.

Elsa Fräulein SS/Fräulein Devil. Dir. Patrice Rohm (aka Mark Stern), Italy/France, 1977.

El Topo/The Mole. Dir. Alejandro Jodorowsky, Mexico, 1970.

Emmanuelle 2/Emmanuelle II, l'anti-vierge. Dir. Francis Giacobetti, France, 1975.

Emanuella Nera in America/Emmanuelle in America. Dir. Joe D'Amato (aka Aristide Massaccesi), Italy, 1976.

eXistenZ. Dir. David Cronenberg, UK/Canada, 1999. [See also primary filmography]

The Exorcist. Dir. William Friedkin, USA, 1973.

The Face of Fu Manchu. Dir. Don Sharp, UK, 1965.

Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!. Dir. Russ Meyer, USA, 1965.

Fetishes. Dir. Nick Broomfield, USA/UK, 1996.

Fight Club. Dir. David Fincher, USA/Germany, 1999. [See also primary filmography]

Finally Punished. Dir. n.a., n.p., n.d. [source: <<https://secure.forbidvid.com/catalog/german/index002.htm>>, accessed July 2003].

Flash Gordon. Dir. Frederick Stephani and Ray Taylor, USA, 1936.

The Fly. Dir. David Cronenberg, USA, 1986.

Freaks. Dir. Tod Browning, USA, 1932.

Freeway 2: Confessions of a Trickbaby. Dir. Matthew Bright, USA/France/Canada, 1999.

Frenzy. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock, UK, 1972.

Friday the 13th. Dir. Sean S. Cunningham, USA, 1980.

The Game. Dir. David Fincher, USA, 1997. [See also primary filmography]

The General's Daughter. Dir. Simon West, USA/Germany, 1999.

Girl Shy. Dir. Fred Newmeyer and Sam Taylor, USA, 1924.

Goldfinger. Dir. Guy Hamilton, UK, 1964.

Groundhog Day. Dir. Harold Ramis, USA, 1993.

Halloween II. Dir. Rick Rosenthal, USA, 1981.

Hannibal. Dir. Ridley Scott, USA, 2001.

Hardcore/The Hardcore Life. Dir. Paul Schrader, USA, 1979.

Hellbound: Hellraiser II. Dir. Tony Randel, UK, 1988.

Hellraiser. Dir. Clive Barker, UK, 1987.

Hellraiser: Bloodline. Dir. Kevin Yagher (aka Alan Smithee) [and Joe Chappelle (uncredited)], USA, 1996.

Hellraiser III: Hell on Earth. Dir. Anthony Hickox, USA, 1992.

Hellraiser: Inferno. Dir. Scott Derrickson, USA, 2000.

Hellraiser VI: Hellseeker. Dir. Rick Bota, USA, 2002.

Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer. Dir. John McNaughton, USA, 1990.

High Anxiety. Dir. Mel Brooks, USA, 1977.

Histoire d'O/The Story of O. Dir. Just Jaeckin, France/West Germany, 1975.

Hookers, Hustlers, Pimps and their Johns. Dir. Beeban Kidron, USA/UK, 1993.

The House of Fear. Dir. Roy William Neill, USA, 1945.

House of Games. Dir. David Mamet, USA, 1987.

House of Wax. Dir. André de Toth, USA, 1953.

If.... Dir. Lindsay Anderson, UK, 1968.

The Illustrated Man. Dir. Jack Smight, USA, 1969.

Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS. Dir. Don Edmonds, USA, 1974.

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade. Dir. Steven Spielberg, USA, 1989.

Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom. Dir. Steven Spielberg, USA, 1984.

Interno di un convento/Behind Convent Walls. Dir. Walerian Borowczyk, Italy, 1977.

The Jigsaw Murders. Dir. Jag Mundhra, USA, 1988.

Johnny Handsome. Dir. Walter Hill, USA, 1989.

Le Journal d'une femme de chambre/Diary of a Chambermaid. Dir. Luis Buñuel, France/Italy, 1964.

Kalifornia. Dir. Dominic Sena, USA, 1993.

Kiss the Girls. Dir. Gary Fleder, USA, 1997.

Lager SS adis kastrat kommandantur/SS Experiment Camp. Dir. Sergio Garrone, Italy, 1976.

The Lair of the White Worm. Dir. Ken Russell, UK, 1988.

Lara Croft: Tomb Raider. Dir. Simon West, USA/Germany/UK/Japan, 2001.

Last House on Dead End Street. Dir. Roger Watkins (aka Victor Janos), USA, 1977.

Lethal Weapon. Dir. Richard Donner, USA, 1987.

Lola Rennt/Run Lola Run. Dir. Tom Tykwer, Germany, 1998.

The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner. Dir. Tony Richardson, UK, 1962.

Love Camp 7. Dir. Lee Frost, USA, 1968.

M. Dir. Fritz Lang, Germany, 1931.

Maîtresse. Dir. Barbet Schroeder, France, 1976.

Le malizie di venere/Venus in Furs. Dir. Massimo Dallamano, Italy/West Germany/UK, 1969.

A Man Called Horse. Dir. Elliot Silverstein, USA, 1970.

The Man from Beyond. Dir. Burton King, USA, 1922.

The Man Who Laughs. Dir. Paul Leni, USA, 1928.

Manhunter. Dir. Michael Mann. USA, 1986. [See also primary filmography]

Maniac!. Dir. William Lustig, USA, 1980.

Mask. Dir. Peter Bogdanovich, USA, 1985.

The Mask of Fu Manchu. Dir. Charles Brabin and Charles Vidor, USA, 1932.

The Matrix. Dir. Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski, USA/Australia, 1999.

The Matrix Reloaded. Dir. Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski, USA/Australia, 2003.

McLintock!. Dir. Andrew V. McLaglen, USA, 1963.

Memento. Dir. Christopher Nolan, USA, 2000.

Mil gritos tiene la noche/Pieces. Dir. Juan Piquer Simón, Spain/USA/Puerto Rico, 1982.

The Miracle Man. Dir. George Loane Tucker, USA, 1919.

Misery. Dir. Rob Reiner, USA, 1990.

Mr Sardonicus. Dir. William Castle, USA, 1961.

Misteria/Body Puzzle. Dir. Lamberto Bava, Italy, 1991.

Moju/Blind Beast. Dir. Yasuzo Masumura, Japan, 1969.

Mortal Kombat. Dir. Paul Anderson, USA, 1995.

The Most Dangerous Game/The Hounds of Zaroff. Dir. Irving Pichel and Ernest B. Schoedsack, USA, 1932.

Mute Witness. Dir. Anthony Waller, UK/Germany/Russia, 1995.

Mystery of the Wax Museum. Dir. Michael Curtiz, USA, 1933.

Naked Lunch. Dir. David Cronenberg, Canada/UK, 1991.

The Net. Dir. Irwin Winkler, USA, 1995.

The Night of the Hunter. Dir. Charles Laughton, USA, 1955.

A Nightmare on Elm Street. Dir. Wes Craven, USA, 1984.

9½ Weeks. Dir. Adrian Lyne, USA, 1986.

Once Were Warriors. Dir. Lee Tamahori, New Zealand, 1994.

Paris, Texas. Dir. Wim Wenders, West Germany/France/UK, 1984.

Paroxismus/Venus in Furs. Dir. Jesús Franco, Italy/West Germany/UK, 1969.

Payback. Dir. Brian Helgeland, USA, 1999.

Peeping Tom. Dir. Michael Powell, UK, 1960.

The Penalty. Dir. Wallace Worsley, USA, 1920.

Performance. Dir. Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg, UK, 1970.

Perils of Nyoka. Dir. William Witney, USA, 1942.

The Perils of Pauline. Dir. Louis J. Gasnier and Donald MacKenzie, USA, 1914.

Personal Services. Dir. Terry Jones, UK, 1987.

Philadelphia. Dir. Jonathan Demme, USA, 1993.

La Pianiste/The Piano Teacher. Dir. Michael Haneke, Austria/France/Germany, 2001.

The Piano. Dir. Jane Campion, Australia, 1993.

The Picture of Dorian Gray. Dir. Albert Lewin, USA, 1945.

Pierce. Dir. Richard Kern, USA, 1986.

Pigs is Pigs. Dir. I. (Friz) Freleng, USA, 1937.

The Pillow Book. Dir. Peter Greenaway, Netherlands/France/UK, 1995.

The Pit and the Pendulum. Dir. Roger Corman, USA, 1961.

Point Break. Dir. Kathryn Bigelow, USA, 1991.

Il portiere di notte/The Night Porter. Dir. Liliana Cavani, Italy, 1973. [See also primary filmography]

Po Urodov i Liudei/Of Freaks and Men. Dir. Aleksei Balabanov, Russia, 1998.

Preaching to the Perverted. Dir. Stuart Urban, UK, 1997.

The Producers. Dir. Mel Brooks, USA, 1968.

Psycho. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1960.

Pulp Fiction. Dir. Quentin Tarantino, USA, 1994.

Rabid. Dir. David Cronenberg, Canada, 1976.

Raging Bull. Dir. Martin Scorsese, USA, 1980.

Raiders of the Lost Ark. Dir. Steven Spielberg, USA, 1981.

Rear Window. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1954.

Rebecca. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1940.

Red Dragon. Dir. Brett Ratner, USA/Germany, 2002.

La Religieuse. Dir. Jacques Rivette, France, 1966.

Reservoir Dogs. Dir. Quentin Tarantino, USA, 1991.

Resident Evil. Dir. Paul Anderson, Germany/UK/France, 2002.

Resurrection. Dir. Russell Mulcahy, USA, 1999. [See also primary filmography]

Return of the Jedi. Dir. Richard Marquand, USA, 1983.

Ripper. Dir. John E. Eyres, Canada, 2001.

Robert Having His Nipple Pierced. Dir. Sandy Daley, USA, 1968.

Rocky. Dir. John G. Avildsen, USA, 1976.

Rollerball. Dir. Norman Jewison, USA, 1975.

Romance. Dir. Catherine Breillat, France, 1999.

Romancing the Stone. Dir. Robert Zemeckis, USA, 1984.

The Running Man. Dir. Paul Michael Glaser, USA, 1987.

Salò o le centoventi giornate di Sodoma/Salo, or The 120 Days of Sodom. Dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini, Italy/France, 1975.

Salon Kitty. Dir. Tinto Brass, France/Italy/West Germany, 1976.

‘Say You’ll Be There’ [music video for the *Spice Girls*]. Dir. Vaughan Arnell, USA, 1996.

Scanners. Dir. David Cronenberg, Canada, 1980.

Scarface. Dir. Howard Hawks, USA, 1932.

Scorpio Rising. Dir. Kenneth Anger, USA, 1964.

Scream. Dir. Wes Craven, USA, 1996.

The Searchers. Dir. John Ford, USA, 1956.

Secret Service in Darkest Africa. Dir. Spencer Gordon Bennet, USA, 1943.

Secretary. Dir. Steven Shainberg, USA, 2002. [See also primary filmography]

Sekka Tomurai Zashi/Irezumi/Spirit of Tattoo. Dir. Yoichi Takabayashi, Japan, 1982.

Series 7: The Contenders. Dir. Daniel Minahan, USA, 2001.

Se7en. Dir. David Fincher, USA, 1995. [See also primary filmography]

The Sewing Circle. Dir. Richard Kern, USA, 1992.

She Freak/Alley of Nightmares. Dir. Byron Mabe, USA, 1967.

Sherlock Holmes and the Spider Woman/Spider Woman. Dir. Roy William Neill, USA, 1944.

Shirley Valentine. Dir. Lewis Gilbert, USA, 1989.

Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan, Supermasochist. Dir. Kirby Dick, USA, 1997. [See also primary filmography]

Signatures of the Soul. Dir. Geoff Steven, New Zealand, 1984.

The Silence of the Lambs. Dir. Jonathan Demme, USA, 1991. [See also primary filmography]

Snuff. Dir. Michael Findlay and Roberta Findlay, USA/Argentina, 1976.

Something Wild. Dir. Jonathan Demme, USA, 1986.

Spartacus. Dir. Stanley Kubrick, USA, 1960.

Spoorloos/The Vanishing. Dir. George Sluizer, Netherlands/France, 1988.

Staggered. Dir. Martin Clunes, UK, 1994.

Storia di una monaca di clausura/Diary of a Cloistered Nun. Dir. Domenico Paolella, France/Italy/West Germany, 1973.

Strange Days. Dir. Kathryn Bigelow, USA, 1995.

Strangeland. Dir. John Pieplow, USA, 1998. [See also primary filmography]

The Strangler. Dir. Burt Topper, USA, 1963.

Street of Crocodiles. Dir. Stephen Quay and Timothy Quay, UK, 1986.

Suor omicidi/Killer Nun. Dir. Giulio Berruti, Italy, 1978.

Swept Away. Dir. Guy Ritchie, UK/USA/Italy, 2002.

Tarzan and the Leopard Woman. Dir. Kurt Neumann, USA, 1946.

Tattoo. Dir. Bob Brooks, USA, 1981. [See also primary filmography]

Tattoo. Dir. Robert Schwentke, Germany, 2002.

Tattoo, San Francisco. Dir. Charles Gatewood, USA, [1988?].

The Tattooed Stranger. Dir. Edward J. Montagne, USA, 1950.

Terminal Island/Knucklemen. Dir. Stephanie Rothman, USA, 1973.

Tesis/Thesis. Dir. Alejandro Amenábar, Spain, 1996.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre. Dir. Tobe Hooper, USA, 1974.

Theatre of Blood. Dir. Douglas Hickox, UK, 1973.

This Sporting Life. Dir. Lindsay Anderson, UK, 1963.

Travolti da un insolito destino nell'azzurro mare d'Agosto/Swept Away/Swept Away ...by an Unusual Destiny in the Blue Sea of August. Dir. Lina Wertmüller, Italy, 1974.

Treasure Island. Dir. Maurice Tourneur, USA, 1920.

True Grit. Dir. Henry Hathaway, USA, 1969.

The Truman Show. Dir. Peter Weir, USA, 1998.

Two Crippled Heroes/Crippled Heroes/Outcasts of Kung Fu. Dir. Shia Yue, USA, 1983.

The Unknown. Dir. Tod Browning, USA, 1927.

Urban Legend. Dir. Jamie Blanks, USA, 1998.

Utamaro o meguru gonin no onna/Five Women around Utamaro. Dir. Kenji Mizoguchi, Japan, 1946.

Verfickt und Zugenäht. Dir. Harry S. Morgan, West Germany, 1997.

Videodrome. Dir. David Cronenberg, Canada, 1982.

Wall Street. Dir. Oliver Stone, USA, 1987.

War is Menstrual Envy. Dir. Nick Zedd, USA, 1992.

The War of the Roses. Dir. Danny DeVito, USA, 1989.

The Watcher. Dir. Joe Charbanic, USA, 2000.

Waterworld. Dir. Kevin Reynolds, USA, 1995.

West of Zanzibar. Dir. Tod Browning, USA, 1928.

Westworld. Dir. Michael Crichton, USA, 1973.

White Heat. Dir. Raoul Walsh, USA, 1949.

White of the Eye. Dir. Donald Cammell, UK, 1987. [See also primary filmography]

White Slaves of Chinatown. Dir. Joseph P. Mawra, USA, 1964.

The Whole Nine Yards. Dir. Jonathan Lynn, USA, 2000.

The Wizard of Oz. Dir. Victor Fleming, USA, 1939.

A Zed and Two Noughts. Dir. Peter Greenaway, UK/Netherlands, 1985.

Discography

Aphex Twin (1997) 'Come to Daddy', *Come to Daddy*, Warp.

PJ Harvey (1993) 'Rid of Me', *Rid of Me*, Island.

New York Dolls (circa 1975) 'Red Patent Leather', [never recorded on a studio album, but did appear on the live album *Red Patent Leather* in 1984, Fan Club].

The Stooges (1969) 'I Wanna Be Your Dog', *The Stooges*, Elektra.

The Velvet Underground and Nico (1967) 'Venus in Furs', *Venus in Furs*, Verve.

The Vibrators (1976) 'Whips and Furs' (single), RAK.

X-Ray Spex (1977) 'Oh Bondage, Up Yours' (single), Virgin.

DVDs

Noyce, P. (2000) 'Director's Commentary', *The Bone Collector* DVD (Region 2), Dir. Phillip Noyce, London: Columbia TriStar Home Video.

Schumacher, J. (1999) 'Director's Commentary', *8mm* DVD (Region 2), Dir. Joel Schumacher, London: Columbia TriStar Home Video.

Exhibitions and Works of Art

Anonymous (circa 100 BC) *Venus de Milo*, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Bob Flanagan's Sick [Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose] (1991) Exhibition at the Art in the Anchorage, New York, August.

—— (1991) Exhibition at the Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, Los Angeles, May.

Boccioni, U. (1913) *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Botticelli, S. (circa 1485) *The Birth of Venus*, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

Dali, S. (1936) *The Anthropomorphic Cabinet*, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf.

—— (1938) *Raining Taxi*, [now part of *El 'carro-naval'*, (1978) including work by Ernst Fuchs and François Girardon], Teatre-Museu Dali, Figueres.

Dix, O. (1922) *Sexual Murder*, Otto Dix Foundation, Vaduz.

Körperwelten (Body Worlds) [Gunther von Hagens] (2002-2003) Exhibition at the Atlantis Gallery, London, 23 March – 9 February.¹

Leonardo da Vinci (1498) *Last Supper*, Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie (Refectory), Milan.

Pink, W. (1834) *Smugglerius (Écorché of Man in the Pose of the 'Dying Gaul')*, after Carlini for William Hunter (original cast 1775), Royal Academy of Arts, London.

Pinson, A-P. (late 18th century) *Anatomy of a Seated Woman*, Laboratoire d'Anatomie comparée, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris.

Sickert, W. (1908) *The Camden Town Murder (What Shall We Do For the Rent?)*, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund, New Haven, CT.

Slocombe, R. (1994) *Yuka on her bed with orthopaedic collar and bandages* [photograph].

Spectacular Bodies [various artists] (2000-2001) Exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, London, 19 October - 14 January.

Visiting Hours [Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose] (1992-93) Exhibition at the Santa Monica Museum of Art, Santa Monica, CA., 4 December – 31 January.

—— (1994) Exhibition at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York City, 23 September – 31 December.

¹ *Körperwelten (Body Worlds)* is a touring exhibition; therefore, the dates listed refer to the exhibition in the United Kingdom.

—— (1995) Exhibition at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA,
February – 5 March.

Witkin, J-P. (1985) *Woman in the Blue Hat* [photograph].

Radio Programmes

Ruscoe on Five, UK, BBC Radio 5, tx. 18.04.97.

Television Programmes

(All dates and channels relate to the first transmission in the UK.)

American Vampires, UK, Channel 4, tx. 26.06.2001.

‘The Showmen’, *The Anatomists*, part 1, UK, Channel 4, tx. 12.03.2002.

‘The Body Snatchers’, *The Anatomists*, part 2, UK, Channel 4, tx. 19.03.2002.

‘A Modern Frankenstein’, *The Anatomists*, part 3, UK, Channel 4, tx. 26.03.2002.

Anatomy of Disgust, part 3, UK, Channel 4, tx. 29.08.2000.

David Blaine: Above the Below, part 1, UK, Sky One, tx. 05.09.2003.

David Blaine: Above the Below, part 2, UK, Sky One, tx. 19.10.2003.

David Blaine: Frozen in Time, UK, Channel 4, tx. 27.05.2001.

Disinfo Nation, USA, Channel 4, tx. 12.01.2001.

Xtremists, parts 1-3, UK, Channel 4, tx. 18.09.2003; 25.09.2003 & 02.10.2003.

Freak Out, parts 1-5, UK, Channel 4, tx. 06.07.2000; 13.07.2000; 20.07.2000;
27.07.2000 & 03.08.2000.

‘Out on a Limb/Complete Obsession: Body Dysmorphia’, *Horizon*, UK, BBC2, tx.
17.02.2000.

‘The First Killings’, *Messiah*, episode 1, UK, BBC1, tx. 26.05.2001.

‘The Reckoning’, *Messiah*, episode 2, UK, BBC1, tx. 27.05.2001.

Messiah II: Vengeance is Mine, episodes 1-2, UK, BBC1, tx. 11.01.2003 &
12.01.2003.

Outside the Rules, episodes 1-2, UK, BBC1, tx. 25.02.2002 & 26.02.2002.

‘Flesh and Wax’, *Raiders of the Human Body*, UK, BBC2, tx. 21.09.1998.

‘The Vanities of Dr Ruysch’, *Raiders of the Human Body*, UK, BBC2, tx.
22.09.1998.

‘Fragonard the Obscure’, *Raiders of the Human Body*, UK, BBC2, tx. 23.09.1998.

‘Body Art’, *The South Bank Show*, UK, LWT, tx. 05.04.1998.

‘Skin’. *Tales of the Unexpected*, UK, Anglia Television, tx. 08.03.1980.

This Morning, UK, Granada Television, tx. 10.10.2000.

Tokyo Bound, Australia/UK, Channel 4, tx. 30.12.2000.

‘Naked’, *Vile Bodies*, UK, Channel 4, tx. 23.03.1998.

‘The Dead’, *Vile Bodies*, UK, Channel 4, tx. 06.04.1998.

World of Pain, UK, Channel 5, tx. 13.01.2002.

Video Games

(As some games are developed for different game consoles/platforms by different companies, the following details relate to the European PlayStation/PlayStation 2 versions of the games, unless otherwise stated.)

Counter-Strike [PC] (1999) CS Team, [*Counter-Strike* is a user modification of *Half-Life*, Valve Software, Fresno, CA: Sierra On-Lin, Inc.].

Donkey Kong [arcade version] (1981) Nintendo Co., Ltd, Redmond, WA: Nintendo of America, Inc.

Doom (1995) Williams Entertainment, [London?]: GT Interactive Software (Europe) Ltd.

Enter The Matrix (2003) Shiny Entertainment Inc, New York: Atari, Inc.

Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb (2003) The Collective, Inc., San Rafael, CA: LucasArts Entertainment Industry.

Max Payne (2001) Rockstar Canada, New York: Rockstar Games.

Metal Gear Solid (1999) Konami Computer Entertainment Japan Co., Ltd, Tokyo: Konami Co., Ltd.

Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty (2001) Konami Computer Entertainment Japan Co., Ltd, Frankfurt: Konami of Europe GmbH.

Raiders of the Lost Ark [Atari 2600] (1982) Atari, Inc., Sunnyvale, CA: Atari, Inc.

Resident Evil (1996) Capcom Co., Ltd, Sunnyvale, CA: Capcom Entertainment, Inc.

Resident Evil – Code: Veronica X (2001) Capcom Co., Ltd, Sunnyvale, CA: Capcom USA, Inc.

Tomb Raider (1996) Core Design Ltd, San Francisco and London: Eidos Interactive.

Tomb Raider Chronicles (2000) Core Design Ltd, San Francisco and London: Eidos Interactive.

Tomb Raider II (1997) Core Design Ltd, San Francisco and London: Eidos Interactive.

Tomb Raider III: Adventures of Lara Croft (1998) Core Design Ltd, San Francisco and London: Eidos Interactive.

Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness (2003) Core Design Ltd, San Francisco and London: Eidos Interactive.

Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation (1999) Core Design Ltd, San Francisco and London: Eidos Interactive.